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CONFIDENTIAL

*Mark Durcan, 1 on  
Robinson, M. Wilson  
M. Myers  
15.7.87*

*PSM  
PSS  
Mr. Durcan  
Counsellors A.I  
A.I Secretariat  
Emb. London.*

*W. Steen*  
*In Devolution*  
*file re.*  
Informal Meeting between 'Young' SDLP and Alliance Party Members  
with Mr. Robinson and Mr. Sammy Wilson (DUP) in  
Belfast at home of U.S. Consul, Mr. Myers  
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*BR 27*  
I met Mark Durcan (Head of John Hume's Office) in Dublin over  
the weekend. John Hume had spoken to me earlier about this.  
Durcan told me that he and Alex Attwood (SDLP Counsellor West  
Belfast) had been invited last week by Myers, the US Consul, to  
a meal at Myers' home in Belfast to meet with Robinson and Sammy  
Wilson of the DUP. Sean Neeson and Eileen Bell of the Alliance  
Party attended. Durcan thought that the NIO (John McConnell)  
were behind this US initiative. Frank Millar had also been  
invited but had to cancel. Durcan said that this allowed the  
conversation to take on a somewhat freer tone.

The conversation was informal and began with small talk about  
the election but then had gone on to the Task Force Report and  
the possibility of political movement. Durcan had commented on  
Robinson's Clontibret incident. Robinson seemed rueful of his  
Court experience. Both Wilson and Robinson were critical of the  
older unionist leadership. It had been difficult to get Paisley  
and Molyneaux to agree to setting up the Task Force. Paisley at  
present was afraid of his own position. The Jim Allister break  
away in East Antrim and Paisley's diminished vote had made him  
hesitant of political risks. Molyneaux on the other hand was  
obsessed by the fate of his predecessors (O'Neill or Faulkner)  
who had gone too far too fast. Wilson and Robinson stressed the  
need for the younger party members to come forward. That was  
the reason for their wanting to meet with young SDLP and  
Alliance members.

There had been some discussion of what was in the full report of  
the Task Force. The section on devolution had more detail.  
Robinson and Wilson said the timing of the publication of the

Task Force Report was deliberately after the general election and before the 12th July weekend. The election result (diminished unionist turn-out) had shown that ordinary unionists wanted positive political leadership. The reaction in the Orange speeches on the 12 July weekend would be important.

As to what would happen next, Robinson and Wilson had hoped that the Task Force members (Robinson, McCusker and Millar) would conduct the low-level talks. There was some criticism that the meeting next Tuesday would be between Paisley and Molyneaux and NIO officials in London. However, after that Paisley would go on holidays to France and Robinson hoped that at that stage quiet contacts would take place then between the NIO and the Task Force authors.

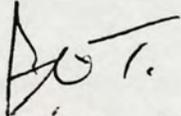
Wilson and Robinson had asked the SDLP members what their position was on devolution. Wilson was critical of the good faith of the SDLP on this. Durcan gave a strong assurance of the commitment of John Hume and the SDLP to devolution as signalled in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The main discussion at this point was on the Agreement with Robinson insisting that the Agreement be done away with as quid pro-quo for a devolved settlement acceptable to the political parties in Northern Ireland. Durcan and Attwood had said that this was impossible from a nationalist point of view and the Alliance members also had insisted on the fail safe aspect of the Agreement (i.e. the Conference would resume its full work if devolution failed to be sustained and this in itself would be a stimulus to make devolution succeed).

This part of the discussion went on for some time with Sammy Wilson insisting that the DUP would need to be able to claim at some stage that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had ended and a new Agreement put in its place. Durcan had put out the idea that if as a result of negotiations between the parties devolution seemed possible, then as part of a package it might be possible to envisage the Governments agreeing to operate the Review

Clause (Article 11) in the Agreement to get the politicians out of an impasse: a way of doing this would be through an Irish-British Joint Communique showing that as a result of a devolved settlement significant changes would occur in the working of the Conference and listing these. Sammy Wilson thought that this might be sufficient for his party to say in East Belfast that an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been arrived at while for the SDLP in West Belfast that the Agreement remained but that Article 11 had been put into effect as intended. Wilson accepted that it would be necessary to satisfy both audiences. Robinson and Wilson hoped that when negotiations between the political parties took place, these could be conducted by the younger leadership, who did not bear the psychological burden of past failures.

The conversation had been friendly and positive. Durcan's impression was that both Wilson and Robinson wanted to end the period of unionist exclusion from political activity. Wilson had referred to the risks he had already taken in public by saying that talks about talks would be possible while the Anglo-Irish Agreement remained in place. Both Robinson and Wilson had said that they wanted to be involved in decision making on Northern Ireland matters - health, education and so on - in Belfast and not having these matters decided from London. What powers should be devolved had been touched on but not gone into in detail. The question of the Maryfield Secretariat was not mentioned.

Durcan felt that it was important that the meeting had taken place and that the DUP attitude to devolution, at the younger leadership level, was so positive.

  
Eamon Ó Tuathail  
14 July, 1987.

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