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19 February, 1988

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lunch with James Kilfeddar, MP

Kilfeddar invited me to a farewell lunch at the House of Commons. I have known him since University days as he was also an auditor of the Hist in Trinity. As you know he is not taken that seriously in Westminster but he has managed to avoid the more idiotic hysteria of his Unionist colleagues and does not disguise his contempt for their tactics. He said somewhat bitchily that he would like to be outside Crumlin Road Jail when Jim Molyneaux goes in.

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He claims that the Unionists do not consult him about much of their activities but from our conversation it was clear that this is not entirely true.

He is still sore about the collapse of "his" Assembly and hankers after his former glory days. I went over the ground again as to why the SDLP could not have gone in under the conditions offered and I spoke at length about the genuine respect for Unionism that emerged from the Forum. He asked me about the Taoiseach's offer to meet Unionists and it became clear that he might be interested himself in taking a personal initiative. However, his political flank would have to be secured in his constituency against Bob McCartney (for whom he reserved his greatest hate) and he would have to be assured that some sort of positive result could be guaranteed from a meeting or encounter on a neutral venue. As he put it himself, he did not want to be met outside Government Buildings by Eamon Mallie asking how it felt to be snubbed by the Irish Government.

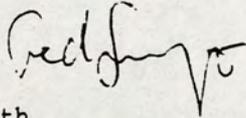
What he would be most interested in achieving is some sort of Dublin blessing for a form of devolved Government in Belfast with responsibility sharing. He claimed at first that the Agreement would be an impossible obstacle but it became clear that if it was rolled back for as long as there was devolution that that might be sufficient. His other doubt is that the SDLP leadership have any interest in the matter although he feels that SDLP politicians like Unionist politicians can only survive if they have some form of political activity which shows that they are holding Northern Ireland civil servants to account. He says that such accountability is not possible in Westminster and the NIO pay little heed to politicians.

He said he would also be worried that the SDLP would behave in a very high-handed way in devolved Government because they would threaten to pull

out on any issue they did not particularly like and reactivate the full inter-Governmental Conference. At the same time he accepted that this might give the SDLP more confidence about accepting the risks of devolution.

As I said Kilfedder is not central in Unionist planning and I report this for what it is worth. However, he is sufficiently eccentric and egotistic that he might be useful in establishing some links with the Unionists if more mainstream and authentic avenues are blocked. In any event, there can be little harm in the Embassy remaining in contact with him.

Refer
Yours sincerely



Ted Smyth

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
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