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Meeting with Mr. Alan Murray, Northern Ireland
Correspondent with the Irish Press

1. I met Mr. Alan Murray, Northern Ireland Correspondent with the Irish Press, in the course of a visit to Belfast on 20 April. Murray said that the Sinn Fein/SDLP talks were the major source of media interest in Northern Ireland. While there were some differences within the SDLP and Sinn Fein about the talks, it was very clear that they were widely supported throughout both organisations and the recent indications from the SDLP and Sinn Fein are that they will continue "indefinitely". Murray said that it was widely known that Eddie McGrady was causing some difficulties but his opposition to the talks was only receiving marginal support within the SDLP. While Martin McGuinness is deeply suspicious of the political strategy being pursued by Adams there was still overwhelming support within Sinn Fein for the talks. According to Murray McGuinness had been particularly angered by strong criticism from Adams and Morrison about the murder of Gillian Johnston in Fermanagh some weeks ago. Adams, however, is sensitive to the objections being raised by MacGuinness and in the course of the previous week Morrison had given a number of media briefings designed to set out the Sinn Fein agenda for the talks.
2. Murray said that in the course of these briefings, Morrison said that the central issue for Sinn Fein is for the British to demonstrate their intention to withdraw from Ireland and to move to a position where they begin to encourage Irish unity. It was clear according to Murray that Sinn Fein remain to be convinced by John Hume's argument that the British no longer have any strategic or economic interest in remaining in Northern Ireland. Morrison told Murray that Sinn Fein want the SDLP to accept and support the establishment of a unitary state as the only means of

achieving lasting peace in Ireland. Morrison does not expect the SDLP to accept Sinn Fein's definition of a unitary state as the establishment of an Irish socialist republic as long as they pursue the objective of seeking a unitary state based on the proclamation of 1916. It will also be vital, in Morrison's view, to see the disbandment of the UDR and the RUC and the release of political prisoners. They also wish the SDLP to very clearly indicate that they are not willing to participate in any internal settlement in Northern Ireland. Morrison was also adamant in the course of his briefing that Sinn Fein are not engaged in any discussions about a ceasefire. He made the point that the IRA campaign will continue until a British declaration of intention to withdraw is secured.

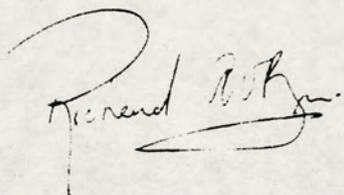
3. As Murray sees it, Adams himself is fighting a major battle in his own mind in seeking to choose between the constitutional process or holding to the strategy of revolutionary socialism. There is a part of him which recoils from facing the prospect of "the long war" - another 20 years in the political wilderness - and another part which tells him that he cannot desert his understanding of the principles of the republican movement and deny the sacrifices of the dead and those who have served long periods in prison. There are also his pragmatic instincts which tell him that he cannot risk provoking a second split following the departure of Republican Sinn Fein in the aftermath of the decision to abandon the abstentionist policy in relation to elections in the South. In this regard, Murray considers that McGuinness' absence from the SDLP/Sinn Fein talks was particularly significant. He also believes that Mitchel McLoughlin is in fact acting as McGuinness' representative at those talks.
4. Murray believes, partly on the basis of his conversation with Morrison, that the Provisional IRA are at present in serious difficulty. They have lost some 18 important active service

members in the course of the last year. The RUC have increased their overall level of security successes, particularly in Derry where the IRA has been reduced to the hard core. They are also deeply worried by the activity of informers as evidenced by Loughgall and Gibraltar.

5. Murray believes that King now suspects although he perhaps does not accept, that the SDLP are very sceptical about devolution. He had a brief exchange with King at Stormont some weeks earlier in the course of which the Secretary of State said to him "I would not say that we are on course". Again in a recent conversation, Robinson told Murray that he believes that Britain has abandoned its interest in maintaining Northern Ireland in a purely British context. Consequently, Robinson argues that Ulster unionism has nothing left to concede. In fact, he now believes that all that unionists can do is try to claw something back. Robinson believes that the Anglo-Irish Agreement has failed to achieve its stated purpose because its stated purpose was not its real purpose. If the SDLP believed that Irish unity could only come about with Unionist consent and if they accepted that this consent is not forthcoming, then they would recognise, as they do not, that the "future structure" to be negotiated must be within the United Kingdom. However, they are clearly indicating in their contacts with Sinn Fein that the structure that they wish to negotiate is within the context of the island of Ireland. It was against this background that he had decided in his speech at Glengormley to call for a unionist convention which would decide on Unionist objectives. Murray believes that, contrary to a good deal of media speculation, Robinson's proposal does not involve an independent Northern Ireland which Robinson privately admits could not sustain itself.

6. Murray feels that the UDA is going through a settling period in the aftermath of McMichael's murder and Tyrrie's removal. While it has not yet unified under a single command

structure, it has equally not fragmented in the way in which many observers had thought likely. In fact, the consolidation of the organisation in North, East and West Belfast has been particularly strong. There is still a great deal of tension in South Belfast and an uncertain mood in the organisation in East Antrim. There are some, particularly in South Belfast, who are involved in racketeering who feel under threat and who indeed pose a threat to others within the UDA.



Richard A. O'Brien

27th April 1988

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