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MOSS

2 June 1988

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
 Assistant Secretary
 Department of Foreign Affairs

*Taormach
 You may be interested**in this**10/16*Dinner with Sir Kenneth Bloomfield

Dear Assistant Secretary

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, joined Mr. Ryan, Mr. Collins and myself for dinner in the Secretariat on June 1st. He was accompanied by Mr. Masefield, the acting British Joint Secretary.

"Talks about Talks"

We had a long conversation on the "talks about talks". Sir Kenneth spoke admiringly of Mr. Molyneaux, with whom he has had increasing contact and who, he said, had been much underestimated. The "talks about talks" with the unionists had been taken as far as they could go in their present form. The Secretary of State might possibly have one further meeting with the SDLP but it would then be necessary to bring people around the table to establish whether there was in fact some prospect of agreement on devolution. His greatest worry, which he emphasised was shared by Mr. King, was that there would be a proliferation of perhaps vague or unstructured contacts, which might in the end become entangled and would yield nothing solid or sustainable. They were concerned about a certain lack of realism in the present climate. When unionists spoke of the "totality of relationships" they meant going back to an East-West framework, a dismantling or dilution rather than an intensification of the North-South relationship. If the SDLP/Sinn Fein talks led to a decision to abandon violence then there would be a very new set of circumstances but this seemed very unlikely and no one should underestimate the revulsion that unionists would feel at any appearance of negotiation with Sinn Fein. Neither should anyone underestimate their resolve to remain British. Sir Kenneth made clear to us that Mr. King was very concerned about the Irish Government's attitude to devolution. The Agreement committed the Irish Government to a policy of supporting devolution. The framework was provided by the Agreement. The thesis put forward by John Hume, that unionists first had to work out their relationship with Dublin, was at variance with this. This approach involved a danger that the best (and, he implied, overambitious) objective could become the enemy of the good (and possibly attainable) one.

We queried the extent to which this more modest objective was in fact attainable. John Hume's position was a logical extension of his earlier

work for the Agreement and reflected his continuing belief that the key to any internal accommodation between the Northern Ireland parties lay in working on their external environment. Since the unionists did not accept the assurances offered to them by the Agreement he was naturally concerned to bridge this gap through a parallel - and very compatible - approach.

On the prospects of agreement on devolution Sir Kenneth said that this could be established only by direct contacts between the parties. The Secretary of State would be anxious to move on to that stage fairly soon. The Irish of all persuasions were poker players and would not show their real hand until they needed to do so. It was significant that in spite of all their protests unionists had not broken off their contacts with Mr. King, even though the most recent communique had underlined the continuing British commitment to the Agreement. He thought there was a mood in unionism which saw devolution as the way forward. He disagreed with the view that Molyneux was simply playing a game to draw people away from the Agreement or that he would be interested only in administrative devolution, but not legislative devolution. There was perhaps a greater unionist openness on this issue than was generally believed. He saw Paisley's opposition - or ambition to absorb the OUP - as lessening because of his age and the fact that the DUP was now more than a Paisley party. The local Government elections next year were an important deadline. Direct rule in its present form could not continue. It was generating a sense of irrelevance and irresponsibility in local politicians. The Forum alternatives described as 'out, out, out' by Mrs. Thatcher remained out. The adjustments to direct rule if devolution failed might include something on the lines of the Industrial Development Board - semi-autonomous boards with local participation to oversee the executive functions likely to be hived off under the new British approach to the Civil Service. He spoke of his concern that the absence of a devolved Government would make it that much more difficult to cater for Irish or local concerns in what might well become a more standardised and integrated approach to governing Northern Ireland.

The unmistakable underlying message which Sir Kenneth was at pains to convey was that support for the search for devolved Government - implicitly, by encouraging the SDLP to come seriously into negotiations - would be viewed as a serious test of the Irish commitment to the Agreement and that an emphasis on alternative approaches would be regarded as contrary to its spirit. We objected that Mr. King's view of the Agreement as 'an end in itself' was at variance with the concept of the Agreement as a set of agreed procedures to handle both the status quo and the possibility of change. This latter remained a legitimate nationalist aspiration, as was recognised in Article 1 and, we had thought, was an underlying premise of the entire Agreement. We had not seen the Agreement as joint authority, but many people had hoped that there would be close informal partnership between the two sides. In the event the British had consistently sought to minimise any suggestion that the Agreement or the Irish Government had influenced their actions (even in cases, such as Fair Employment, where that influence was significant). That attitude probably explained much of the nationalist disillusionment about the Agreement now perceptible in opinion polls. The procedures in the Agreement were intended to facilitate a spirit of partnership, and if that spirit was missing the Agreement would make no significant contribution to the search for progress.

West Belfast

Sir Kenneth prefaced his discussion of this issue with a number of cautionary remarks: Everything came down to a question of financial priority and one had to balance the requirements of West Belfast against say, those of Derry or Strabane. Secondly their concerns would relate to all West Belfast, including the Shankill, not just the nationalist areas. Thirdly, part of the solution to West Belfast lay outside the area - for example in access to the relatively neutral city centre. That being said, they recognised that there were very major problems which had to be addressed. It would be unrealistic to expect the private sector to take the lead in the area. He spoke at some length of the enormous difficulties faced by employers already in West Belfast and of a "museum of horrors" he had recently been shown illustrating the security problems experienced by one large employer. The public sector had to give a lead. He indicated that there would be a reversion to some elements of the "Belfast area of need" approach which had been carried out in the seventies under Lord Melchett. There would be a programme involving much more structured involvement of private firms who would "adopt" particular schools or areas. Training facilities would endeavour to train people for integrated operations i.e. an entire range of skills to meet the defined needs of particular employers or which could be set up to operate small local enterprises. The BATS teams would be expanded significantly. There would be programmes aimed at enhancing the quality of life and the self-esteem of neighbourhoods. There would be considerable reliance on community organisations to foster a sense of local commitment (although there were particular difficulties arising from a tendency of paramilitaries to use some of these as front organisations). They hoped in particular to secure the co-operation of organisations such as the West Belfast Enterprise Board and the Phoenix Thrust. Sir Kenneth spoke very warmly of Bishop Cathal Daly and Fr. Matt Wallace. He saw the Catholic clergy as having a much better sense of the realities of these working class areas than the SDLP, which had a more middle class image. He hoped to find a budget of somewhere in the region of £10million in the current year to finance this programme. Apart from this new financing there was also the need to co-ordinate or adapt existing programmes since Government programmes of various kinds had an impact on the area. He instanced the position of the Royal Victoria Hospital in this respect. He would be chairing a committee to oversee and integrate these aspects at a very senior level. Mr. Nigel Hamilton, who would manage the special action unit, was one of their most energetic officers and would bring an active and imaginative approach to bear, as would the leaders of the new BATS teams.

We asked about the presentational aspects of the likely announcement of this programme. Sir Kenneth accepted that it had been "trailed" for a number of Conferences and should now be dealt with by the Conference in a more substantive way. He was aware that we had asked for a meeting of officials on this issue. He said he would wish to discuss the presentational aspect with the Secretary of State and come back to us.

Policing

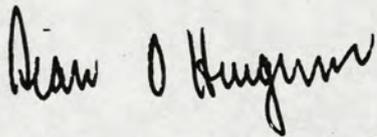
We had a brief and fairly inconclusive discussion on policing issues, arising from the perception of many clergymen in West Belfast that the RUC have practically abandoned normal policing in the area. Sir Kenneth felt that it should be possible to go some way to meet the concerns of clergy on

this, although there were obvious difficulties arising from the danger that distress calls were made to lure police into ambush. He showed himself very opposed to the idea of any regionalisation or compartmentalisation of policing within Northern Ireland on grounds that it could lead to a Beirut type situation of individual fiefdoms and local strongmen. The need was to draw people and organisations together in Northern Ireland, not to fragment them further.

Education

At the conclusion of our meeting we spoke on the current controversy arising from Dr. Mawhinney's proposals to introduce a version of the Baker Proposals to Northern Ireland. We drew attention to the widespread concern being expressed by nationalist representatives that the Mawhinney proposals appeared a doctrinaire and integrationist alignment of the Northern education system on the English model. There was a very stark contrast between the spirit of these proposals and the enlightened approach to Welsh language and culture taken in the equivalent Welsh document. In the light of Dr. Mawhinney's commitment to promote community relations we suggested that it would be a valuable opportunity to introduce a programme of Irish Studies as a foundation subject. This could cover aspects such as the Irish language but could go beyond a purely linguistic course to embrace heritage studies etc and could be adapted by different schools to meet their particular needs. Sir Kenneth said that Dr. Mawhinney was concerned to ensure that the new curriculum equipped pupils with basic skills, including foreign language skills, to make their way in the outside world. He himself however seemed quite open-minded on the proposal to modify the curriculum in the way we had suggested.

Yours sincerely,



Sean O'hUiginn

