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FROM: M J WILLIAMS
US(POL)
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cc PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Dodds
Mr Brooker *WJ* - B
Mr Quinn - B
Mr Maxwell - B
Mr McCusker - B
Mr Archer RID - B
HMA Dublin - B

Mr Watkins - B

LUNCH AT MARYFIELD WITH BISHOP GORDON McMULLAN: 18 MAY 1993

I thought that colleagues might be interested to hear of the visit to Maryfield by Bishop Gordon McMullan, who attended a lunch to mark the departure of Mr Marcus Dodds. Bishop McMullan was one of three outside guests, one of the others being Mr Doug Archard, and the setting was essentially a social occasion. In the event the lunch provided a very useful opportunity for Bishop McMullan and the Irish side to exchange views, particularly on the theme of Protestant perceptions in Northern Ireland. The discussions tied in helpfully with earlier visits to Maryfield by the main Protestant Church Leaders. Although there was nothing new in what Bishop McMullan had to say he expressed his views in a very articulate and forthright manner, and he engaged the Irish in a way which they seemed to warm to. The Bishop's working class background of East Belfast may have given him an added degree of interest to the Irish side.

2. One point of note was that although Bishop McMullan reflected a number of themes which we have already heard across the dinner table

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at Maryfield I do not recall that he used the word 'alienation' as such. Undoubtedly his comments were pointed in that direction, but it may have been helpful that the absence of that particular word discouraged Irish heckles from being raised in the way which they often are when people refer to the notion of Protestant alienation. Bishop McMullan did say there was a very definite sense of loss amongst the unionist community; it was perceived that the nationalists wanted, and were always given, yet never appeared satisfied. The panoply of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the workings of the Intergovernmental Conference were seen as directed for the benefit of nationalists and, despite all these apparent advantages falling to the Catholic community, there has been no perceived improvement in security and no diminution in the activities of PIRA. Whilst it appeared that there had been an increase in loyalist paramilitary activity many protestants saw this as not so much based on a random hatred of Catholics, but as a reaction to the failure to reduce the level of republican inspired violence; Bishop McMullan argued that measured on the scale of attacks, rather than fatalities, republican terrorism was still the main threat.

3. As part of this weakening of their position unionists also perceived that their elected representatives were too easily ignored, or bypassed, by the British Government. He referred to a perception amongst many Protestants that, through the medium of official functions (he mentioned tea and sherry parties) at places such as Hillsborough Castle, members of quangos and boards were cultivated and influenced by the British Government; hence the role of elected representatives was minimised. Bishop McMullan added that unionists had had their own problems, in that it was only now that they were appreciating the need to reach out and put their case across in a much more positive manner. In response to a point from Mr O'Donovan he disagreed that unionists would warm to the idea of comments emanating from the IGC to the effect that the Irish were putting pressure on the British Government to secure more resources for disadvantaged Protestant areas. Bishop McMullan stated very firmly that people in loyalist estates would see this as a further move by the Irish Government towards their aim of joint sovereignty, rather than as an attempt by the South to make overtures to them.

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4. In regard to the Talks process he criticised the Irish Government as having let the UUP down very badly by failing to provide any 'pay-off' for their going to Dublin. The Irish response of simply repeating in a very forthright manner what was 'not available' had not helped the UUP's position'. The UUP members had gone to Dublin at some political risk to themselves and they were now in a position where those who had opposed their going could quite easily say "we told you so". In reality the slogan of 'not an inch' was more appropriate to Dublin rather than Belfast. In addition he made the point that unionists did not see the Taoiseach and the Tanaiste as working in tandem. Despite the overtures that might be made by Mr Spring, unionists inevitably paid more attention to Mr Reynolds, and his comments were not seen as giving any cause for hope.

5. This was a lunch which, despite being for Mr Dodds' departure, focused heavily on Bishop McMullan's analysis of the Protestant position. It was interesting that Doug Archard identified with much of what Bishop McMullan said. I believe that Bishop McMullan could fit well into our category of non-political unionists who might articulate the various strands of unionist opinion to other DFA officials. My impression is that the Irish found it a very useful exchange and that if we did seek to encourage Bishop McMullan to express his views to other Irish officials this first encounter will have helped create a favourable impression.

6. Mr O'Donovan has subsequently commented that he was alarmed at the Bishop's explanation of loyalist paramilitary violence. In my view this confirms that he does not really understand unionism; as I had suggested to Mr Donoghue that the DFA did not understand it either.

[SIGNED MJW]

M J WILLIAMS
Ext 27083

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