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N/S Bodies*

FROM: HMA Dublin
DATE: 18 November 1998

TO: Mr Jeffrey

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
PS/Paul Murphy (L&B)
PS/Adam Ingram (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/John Semple (L&B)
Mr McCusker
Mr Stephens
Mr Warner
Mr Bell
Mr George Fergusson, RID, FCO

*M
20/11*

CALL ON MARTIN MANSERGH, SPECIAL ADVISER, TAOISEACH'S DEPARTMENT : 18 NOVEMBER

1. Following our conversation earlier today, I called on Martin Mansergh this afternoon.
2. Mansergh started by telling me that he thought the position of the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Fein was a mirror image of each other. Both were "sitting pretty". They were reasonably comfortable with the present stalemate which suited them both quite well. They believed that pressure for movement would build up on the other, while they themselves could withstand any such pressures exerted upon them. In their view, if there was to be change, this would have to be the result of an initiative by the two Prime Ministers.
3. I asked Mansergh about recent meetings in which he had participated. He said that late on Monday Trimble had summoned him and others, sounding in upbeat mood. However, by the time Mansergh and his colleagues (including Teahon and Gallagher) saw Trimble on Tuesday, his mood had changed. He and his colleagues proved intransigent on North/South bodies, raising niggling arguments on unimportant points. For example, on waterways Trimble had made it plain he did not view this as an all-Ireland body but more of a cross-border organisation dealing with the waterways in the nine counties of Ulster (plus Leitrim). Trimble had also expressed strong objections to any North/South body involving national identity, including tourism. The logic here seemed to be that as Northern Ireland was so much smaller than the Republic, the former should be promoted separately. The conversation had also demonstrated that Trimble's interest in the detail of North/South bodies had waned as he was now looking for a package encompassing the three main points currently at issue: the Ministerial portfolios; North/South bodies; and decommissioning.
4. Altogether, it had been a depressing encounter, with Trimble demonstrating his capacity to blow hot and cold. The subsequent meeting with the Secretary of State had been much more positive - if inconclusive.

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5. Mansergh went on to consider whether more could be done to identify middle ground acceptable to both parties, but without making any realistic suggestions. In short, he believed that without the establishment of the institutions there would be no movement on decommissioning. If this situation persisted for another two months or so, everybody in favour of making the Agreement work would be worse off, while the critics of the Agreement would be vindicated. The central dilemma was how to generate pressure on the extremists while focusing on the middle ground.

6. Finally, Mansergh expressed his frustration at the current situation, and feared it might grow worse as Trimble spent more and more time on overseas commitments following his Nobel Prize. Worst of all however, was the suspicion that for both Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionists a collapse of the Good Friday Agreement was not necessarily the least desirable outcome. If this were to happen they would retain the support of their grass roots, while blaming each other and the governments for the breakdown.

COMMENT

7. I would describe Mansergh as resigned rather than depressed. He did not yet know how the Taoiseach proposed to tackle his meeting on Friday with Trimble, as there would be a discussion on this tomorrow. But, as is clear from the above, he had no imaginative thinking about breaking the impasse.

(SIGNED)

Veronica Sutherland
Ambassador

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