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FROM: C G MACCABE  
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION  
10 January 1997

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*in copy (15.1)*

*Lelia  
1/14/97*

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As MacCabe*

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C.C.R.U.

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

CONVERSATION WITH EDDIE McGRADY

I lunched with Eddie McGrady in Saul today. It was our first conversation since the Talks adjourned last month. McGrady was in good form and anxious to know how I read the present situation.

2. We began by discussing John Hume's appearance on today's 'Talkback'. McGrady had only heard the last few minutes of the programme, and was intrigued to learn from me that Hume had replied to a caller who asked why Hume/Adams had never been published, by telling him to read Mallie and McKittrick's 'The Fight For Peace' where he would find the text in full. McGrady said it would have been nice if Hume had told his senior colleagues this a long time ago, for they could only guess what Hume/Adams contained. He thought it a bit glib, and probably a bit disingenuous too, for Hume to be directing enquirers now towards Mallie and McKittrick's book.

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3. More generally on Hume/Adams, the unease that McGrady displayed for some years is still apparent. Like everyone else he wants peace, but he is very suspicious about Sinn Fein's real objectives, and about Hume's objectivity about the 'peace process'.

4. As regards an SDLP/Sinn Fein electoral pact, McGrady is opposed to the idea, even following a restoration of PIRA's ceasefire. Equally, he shares the view of one 'Talkback' caller that if Northern Ireland representation at Westminster was, say, 11 Unionists and 7 Nationalists an historic mould would be broken. In such a happy eventuality (for Nationalists) Unionists would be denied the luxury of being able to promote themselves as an overwhelming majority in Northern Ireland and as a result **just might** be driven in the direction of compromise.

5. Whatever happens, McGrady views the forthcoming General and Local Government Elections with some trepidation. On the one hand, he fears that if PIRA violence continues at the current, comparatively muted, level, Sinn Fein's drive, commitment and organisational competence could see them increasing their votes in both Elections at the SDLP's expense. On the other hand, if there is a descent into very serious violence they could fall back on their basic support, whilst the SDLP would probably fail to improve their position at Sinn Fein's expense.

6. McGrady said the SDLP Talks team is due to meet tomorrow to consider the current situation and likely developments in the short and mid terms. He said he knew David Trimble was anxious to bring the Talks to an end and asked me what I thought the chance of this happening was. I said the situation was difficult to read, but the UUP were certainly becoming increasingly wary of involvement in a high-wire act (as their former Leader would have put it) as the Election dates drew closer. A possible compromise, provided everyone could agree, was for a suspension of the Talks in the

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not-too-distant future until after the General Election. The process could, however, continue through bilaterals and/or any other contact those involved thought useful. But what was the SDLP's attitude?

7. McGrady declined to be categorical but did say that the SDLP were reluctant to bring the process to a halt, even a temporary one, just because David Trimble wanted that. He recognised, however, that little progress was likely before the General Election, as Monday and the days and weeks following would be dominated by continuing wrangling about decommissioning, and further demands by the DUP and UKUP (and probably the UUP) for expulsion of the PUP and UDP. Commenting on the reported pre-Christmas deal on decommissioning between the SDLP, UUP and Alliance Party, McGrady said everyone who had been around at the earlier Talks had seen how the UUP used papers by Ken Maginnis as a lure for concessions by the SDLP, only to withdraw them at the last minute. This was but the latest example of this cynical tactic.

8. Whatever happens in the Talks, McGrady expects the Forum to be brought to an end in May at the very latest, and preferably much sooner. He described it as an embarrassment and a farce. He also had some harsh things to say about HMG's "dishonesty" during the passage of the Entry to Negotiations Bill. These centred on (allegedly broken) promises that the Forum would not be allowed to turn itself into a reincarnation of Stormont, as - McGrady claimed - it had done.

9. Finally, McGrady took his ritual swipes at the IDB - institutionalised discrimination against new jobs for South Down; and the DOE - change for change's sake, planning chaos and a chronic disposition to promote the cause of increased powers for local government. I put up the best defences I could.

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Comment

10. This was a useful meeting, if only because I was able to confirm that the current status of the SDLP, with the exception of John Hume, is what you see is what you get. McGrady is realistic about the prospect of progress in the Talks before the General Election, but is determined that the SDLP will not leave it to the UUP to make all the running in Castle Buildings, or Sinn Fein at the hustings. We shall see.

[signed CGM]

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