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Title: Memorandum by Dermot Nally, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, reporting on his meeting with Maurice Hayes, one of the Secretaries to the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention, and referring the work of the Convention and its Chairman, Sir Robert Lowry, political representatives participating and other political matters in Northern Ireland

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W. Nally

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NORTHERN IRELAND


1. I met Mr. Maurice Hayes, one of the Secretaries to the Northern Ireland Convention, by arrangement, for a short time on the night of Saturday, 27th September, to talk about developments, as he saw them, in Northern Ireland.
2. Mr. Hayes said that, as things stood now, it looked as if the Convention would end its proceedings on 7th November - give or take a week or so. They would be making up their minds on or about the 27th October as to whether to ask for an extension of their time, or what they should do otherwise.
3. He said that, as things now were, it would be the Chairman and Convention staff who would be putting the report together. They would be basing their draft on what the parties to the Convention gave them but the final version going before the Convention would be what the Convention officials produced. Of course, he did not know what sort of report the Convention itself would finally adopt.
4. Mr. Hayes said that Sir Robert Lowry, Chairman of the Convention, had earned the respect of every party to it. Every member spoke highly of his capabilities and disinterestedness. Sir Robert himself was, occasionally, at sea in the rather intricate negotiating processes that were going on. For example, he might be told by a particular group that a certain line of action was thoroughly acceptable; the same group would then go public and on some other platform repudiate completely what they had, a short time before, apparently been in fully agreement about.
5. The Craig moves had taken him (Mr. Hayes) completely by surprise. He did not know what was behind them. It could be that Mr. Craig honestly and sincerely believed that the line he was following was the only one, in the interests of the North. It could be, on the other hand, that he had in mind getting some form of devolved Government, in which responsibility for security would be in the North, before Christmas when everybody expected Provo violence to break out again on a considerable scale. However, even this theory was not a realistic one - Mr. Craig, as a former Minister, must know that the time just would not be available to enable a devolved Government to be set up in the North, with functions clearly defined etc., before Christmas.
6. Paisley was a complete unknown. There was, of course, the rivalry between himself and Craig. Mr. Paisley was not following any definite policy - except the policy of obstruction. His actions had come as a complete surprise to the SDLP, who had regarded him as being reasonably well disposed. Paisley may have sniffed the grassroots reaction - or perhaps inspired it - and used what he knew, or thought he knew, as part of his power struggle with Craig.
7. Returning to the prospects for the Convention, Mr. Hayes said that he thought that the British Government would deliberate on the report until early in the new year and then refer it back to a reconstituted Convention for further discussion and elaboration. The SDLP seemed to have the idea that whatever emerged from this reconstituted Convention, if it represented any form of agreement at all, should be given authority by means of a referendum held North and South on the same day.

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- Their idea was to remove the last vestiges of the authority of the entire island ^{under} which the IRA claimed to act. Mr. Hayes said that, in his view, this type of referendum, involving the whole island, would not, and could not be accepted by the loyalists. The very idea of involving the people of the South in decisions affecting the future of the North, in this way, would be anathema to them.
8. Mr. Hayes said that they (which I took to mean the Chairman and Secretaries of the Convention) would like to be consulted, even informally, by the Northern Ireland Office on the questions which that Office would be putting to the Convention. I took this to be one of the main purposes of our conversation, so far as Mr. Hayes was concerned and felt that he would like us, through our channels, to convey this wish to the British. He seemed to place great stress on the idea of prior consultations.
9. In general conversation, Mr. Hayes, who has had great experience of local government in Northern Ireland, said that the reformed system there had broken down completely. The major complaint was remoteness and inability of persons to make contact with responsible members or officials.
10. He also referred incidentally to the recent meeting at Amherst, where he said that Mr. Seamus Costello had made some spine-chilling diagnoses of the situation. According to Costello, the Russian revolution had succeeded because the Russian people, had been completely and utterly demoralised by their experiences first in the war with the Germans, and next by their own internal troubles. According to Costello, the way forward in the North, for the views that he represented, lay through a similar form of demoralisation of the entire people there. He (Costello) would, of course, not himself take part in the process by which this demoralisation came about, but he would certainly do nothing to prevent it.
11. Mr. Hayes went on to say that there was a strong suggestion in the North, made to him, in all seriousness by Mr. Oliver Napier, that the Special Branch here were providing special protection for Mr. Costello. This had given rise to a certain amount of derisory comment in the North. I said that, to the best of my knowledge, the story was completely untrue.
12. I said that I had been glad of the opportunity to have the meeting, and asked Mr. Hayes to maintain the contact. He said that he would.



29th September 1975.

[Copy to Mr. Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs.]

[Mr. Hayes also expressed the view during our conversation that the talk about civil war, doomsday etc. was all far too alarmist, and did not in his view represent anything like the true position. He himself was building a new house - as an expression of confidence in the future or perhaps, as he put it, partly as a protection against inflation.]