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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To: Mr. Nally
From: Mr. W. Kirwan.

Background paper for proposed Government/SDLP meeting on Strategy

You asked for a background paper for the informal discussion between the Taoiseach and a small SDLP group provisionally fixed for 4th September. The attached paper is an initial response to this request.

It takes as its starting-point the point made by the SDLP at the Taoiseach's meeting with them on 17th July that when the Taoiseach next meets the British Prime Minister he should look for quadripartite discussions. I understand that the Taoiseach has quite independently considered proposing a quadripartite conference: taking my cue from other points recorded in your note of the meeting, the attached paper is largely based on a relatively sanguine view whereby it might well be possible to persuade the British to convene such a conference. We do not know to what extent anything said by Mrs. Thatcher in the private exchanges between her and the Taoiseach on 21st May last give grounds for confidence that she would be favourably disposed towards the idea of such a conference if the Atkins process peters out. However, the impressions we have been receiving from some official British sources recently tend to point in the direction of alternative directions by the British Government in such an eventuality. There is also some evidence that they see the "new and closer political co-operation" as being very much concerned with U.K./Republic ~~on~~ ~~or~~ British-Irish relations i.e. ^{with} only one of the Taoiseach's three dimensions and also that they may see it set in an EEC/Nine framework.

The preceding points are made by way of a corrective to the rather forward-looking character of the attached paper. As the meeting with the SDLP is in the nature of a "think-in", the paper is rather a think-piece. It raises questions rather than supplies answers. It is in the form of a list of major questions for consideration, looking well into the future, with notes on each question: the notes, however, largely list matters requiring further consideration.

At the end of the paper, the question of the appropriate reaction if the British do not go for the conference

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approach is raised. While work on many of the questions raised in the paper could be pursued in the Departments here if we got some political responses from the Taoiseach and his colleagues, it may be necessary as a priority for the envisaged meeting with the SDLP, to concentrate on the question as to how the British can be persuaded to convene discussions of the character envisaged and how the Unionists can be brought to attend them.

The subject-matter of the meeting with the SDLP overlaps with the question of the content of the Taoiseach's meeting with Mrs. Thatcher where the British have on a number of occasions sought our views on the content of closer political co-operation and on subjects for the regular meetings on a continuing basis agreed to in London on 21st May. I am considering this matter separately and propose to have an exchange of views with Foreign Affairs soon, following which I hope to put forward some views, well in advance of the proposed meeting at official level with the British tentatively fixed for 11th September.

hvk vma

31st July, 1980.

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List of principal questions raised in attached paper.

1. Attitude to be adopted by SDLP to possible British approach of dragging out talks with Northern Ireland parties.
2. To what extent should Irish Government draw public link between "the fullest possible programme of consultation and discussion" referred to in paragraph 64 of the British White Paper and the new and closer political co-operation between the two Governments, involving regular meetings, on a continuing basis, between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister?
3. How to move from White Paper to situation where British Government agree to convene conference and where there is prospect of reasonable unionist attendance?
4. Would conference with completely open basis i.e. with no British declaration or modification of the guarantee or any advance statement of a change in the context, be (a) acceptable (b) likely to be fruitful?
5. What would be basis for representation of Northern Ireland parties?
6. Agenda for Conference?
7. Positions to be taken at Conference and immediate outcome sought.
8. What pace of constitutional change is to be aimed at and is considered realistic and attainable having regard to British and unionist attitudes? What is to be minimum objective in this respect?
9. Constitutional arrangements under various possible models/stages.
10. Guarantees and safeguards for unionist fears and outlets for their loyalties and pieties.
11. Safeguards for British interests.
12. What would constitute adequate balance between moves and offers by Irish and British Governments (and SDLP) at different stages that are conceivable?

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13. The full range of financial and economic questions.

14. What should reaction be if British opt for an alternative approach either attempting to impose a solution over the heads of the political parties, possibly with the use of a popular referendum or falling back on the type of approach envisaged in the Conservative Party's 1979 Election Manifesto or something similar?