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Meeting with SDLP

The Taoiseach, the Tanaiste and the Minister met with Hume, Mallon, Hendron and McGrady over dinner last night. The Secretary, Mr. O Ceallaigh and the undersigned were present.

The SDLP sought clarification of British intentions in relation to the UDR and Irish intentions in relation to extradition.

Following some detailed discussion, Hume said he would like to set out his Party's position. He said there had been a long Party meeting last Wednesday, one of the most successful for a long time. What the Party would propose to say would be the following:

- They would ask the public to study the Agreement in detail and not to react impetuously. They would say that of course implementation is the most important thing in any agreement and the SDLP would be following this aspect very closely. They would say that the Agreement represents an opportunity to make progress towards peace and stability and they would wish it a fair wind.

Mallon intervened to say that he would like to make a personal statement: there were things about the Agreement which he liked and things which he didn't like. He would be mentioning both what he liked and what he didn't like. His concerns were concentrated in the area of justice notably the UDR and extradition. This is not a criticism of the Irish Government. He would not say anything critical about the position of the Irish Government in a personal way: his point of departure would be the position of his Party on these particular issues. He had thought very long about his position. While saying that the Agreement does not provide what the SDLP wanted on the UDR, he would acknowledge that we now have the machinery to work towards that. On the ideological level, he believed that the machinery had been

created for dealing with the British Government on a basis from which the whole nationalist position can be developed (Hume intervened to suggest the word "accommodate"). Mallon repeated the point that he would not be attacking the Irish Government but only criticising the British Government for a failure to give enough in certain areas. He said that he had had six months of hell on this issue. Two major considerations had brought him to his decision: (i) the way in which John Hume had presented the issue at the Party meeting last Wednesday; (ii) his concern not to do anything which would split the Party.

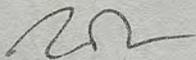
The Taoiseach said that he appreciated the remarks both of Hume and of Mallon. What has emerged is far short of what our aspirations would require for fulfilment. It is a small step. The Government realises that it is taking a considerable risk as is of course the SDLP. But there is within the Agreement potential for much more progress. When he had first met Mrs. Thatcher, she had been in Opposition, and it had been clear to him that if he could "turn her", she had the qualities necessary to do something serious about the North. He thought the Tory Party could carry the situation under her leadership. He had made up his mind when he met her to make a major effort to have some influence over her. The Taoiseach continued: he hoped that we would both be lucky and avoid crises which could do great damage to the process. It has the potential to go far beyond its present state. Others see it as the beginning of an historic process; he wasn't sure whether they were right. Anything that could possibly bring peace was worth trying. Even if we failed he would have no doubt that it had been worth trying.

Mallon said it would be only fair to say that this is one of the most moving moments he had ever experienced. He would go beyond that. He would like to make it absolutely clear that he personally and his Party would put their shoulder to the wheel and that Garret FitzGerald as Taoiseach would not find him wanting. Nor would the Irish Permanent Minister. Nor

would those who take on the dangerous business of serving in the Secretariat find him wanting. (Mallon also made the point in a very pointed way just as the dinner was breaking up that, so far as he was concerned, no matter who was in government in Dublin, it was the Government which dealt with the Irish nationalist interest outside of Ireland including the United States. He went on to thank the Taoiseach for the direct and full way in which the Taoiseach had treated the SDLP)

Hume concluded by saying that the Taoiseach and his colleagues had included Hume and his three colleagues in the detail of the most secret negotiations between the Irish Government and the British Government in a way which the SDLP had found to be extremely impressive. It was a very new development. For the first time "our people" have been treated with total confidence.

The Tanaiste and the Minister for Foreign Affairs paid tribute to the SDLP, Hume expressed appreciation for the work of the Irish officials present and the meeting ended on an emotional note with each side wishing the other good fortune in the context of the Agreement.



M.J. Lillis

12 November 1985

c.c. Taoiseach
Tanaiste
Minister
Minister for Justice
Attorney General

Secretary
Mr. Nally
Mr. Quigley
Mr. Ward
Ambassador London