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Conversation with Ken Maginnis
Boston, 14 February, 1992

1. Ken Maginnis M.P. was in Boston recently in his capacity as Mayor of Dungannon for the opening of the new Tyrone Crystal shop here. Among those who accompanied him were the deputy-Mayor of Dungannon, SDLP Councillor Jim Cavanagh, the Council's Chief Executive, Bill Beattie, and Paddy Duffy, Chairman of Tyrone Crystal and IFI Board member. While he was here I had the opportunity of speaking with him; the following are some of the main points he made during our conversation.

Talks

2. Maginnis was resigned to the belief that inter-party talks would not re-start - at least until after the British General election which, he felt, would be in early April. At that stage, however, there would be renewed pressure for a re-commencement of the Talks process. He said that even at that juncture there would be great difficulty in getting the parties to agree to a meaningful settlement. The main reason for this was that "there are 2 1/2 bulwarks against meaningful agreement"; one was Ian Paisley, one was John Hume and the 1/2 was Jim Molyneaux". (Maginnis added that he categorised Molyneaux as a 1/2 out of a sense of obligation to be kind to his own leader.)

3. In the opinion of Maginnis, not one of the 3 current leaders was "willing to be generous enough" to give the talks "the kick start" necessary for success. He said that the new Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs had an opportunity to change Unionist negative perceptions of the Irish Government; such a change in perception would, in its turn, alter the entire political landscape in the North.

Articles 2 and 3

4. Echoing a familiar theme, Maginnis argued that the desired changes could be brought about by a commitment on the part of the Irish Government to "get rid of Articles 2 and 3" of the Constitution. Speaking on Unionist perceptions regarding the



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erosion of their position in Northern Ireland, Maginnis said that - while he himself would not necessarily concur - most Unionists felt that over the past 20 years they "had given and given with no return" (and conversely that Nationalists had "received and received without giving anything in return"). Therefore, he believed that a major concession - like a change of attitude on Articles 2 and 3 - would start a political transformation in Northern Ireland.

5. Maginnis admitted that even such a concession would not change the implacable minds of Jim Molyneaux and Ian Paisley. However, he was confident that it would unseat Jim Molyneaux from the UUP leadership - unless he was prepared to respond to the opportunity it gave the Unionists for some sort of reciprocal concession to Nationalists. He also maintained that such a statement by the Irish Government would also clear the way for meaningful negotiations leading to a political settlement. I reminded him that, since assuming office, the Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs had clearly committed themselves to doing everything possible to remove barriers to meaningful talks and that, at that stage, everything would be on the table.

UUP Leadership

6. Maginnis also spoke about the opinion makers within the UUP who, like himself, were pro-talks; he named them as Jim Nicholson, Reg Empey, Chris McGimpsey, Jack Allen, Raymond Fergusson and Geoffrey Donaldson. These individuals formed the officer corp of the Ulster Unionist Council together with Molyneaux, Martin Smyth, Josiah Cunningham and himself.
7. As regards the future leadership of the party, Maginnis believed that, if Molyneaux were to vacate the post, Martin Smyth would be regarded as the obvious front-runner on account of his strong support within the Orange Order, who make up the bulk of 350 approximately Council members. (Maginnis reminded me that it was the full Council which votes for the leader rather than the officers of the party or its Westminster MPs.) Maginnis felt that John Taylor did not have the requisite support in the Council to be in with any realistic chance of succeeding in a leadership contest; as an earnest of this lack of support, he pointed out that Taylor could not even secure an executive position on the Council.
8. As regards his own prospects in a future leadership contest, Maginnis believed that - with the support of the pro-talks cadre mentioned above - he could be able to secure enough votes to succeed Molyneaux. Maginnis felt that even now he



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might give Smyth a close run for the leadership; with a sufficient lead-in time for canvassing, Maginnis contended he could win comfortably.

9. (Comment: While the above assessment of his own position within the UUP - and indeed the other points made by Maginnis during our conversation - were most likely intended to show that he was a major political player in Northern Ireland, his categorisation of the various forces within the party was nonetheless of interest. Whether Ken Maginnis could be a serious contender for the leadership of the UUP is debatable; however, his remarks would at least seem to suggest that like-minded individuals are making some headway within the Ulster Unionist Council.)

Liam Canniffe
Liam Canniffe
Consul General
Boston, 23 February, 1992

Ambassador, Washington