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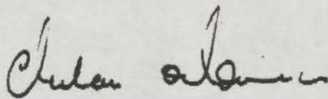
More on Mr Brooke's Meeting with the SDLP on 10 January 1992

Quentin Thomas gave more detail at Stormont this afternoon of the exchanges on the possibility of a change in administration.

Hume said he did not understand why the Unionists were having difficulties about continuing the talks on the same basis after the election. The issues would be the same, the agenda would be the same and McNamara had given written assurances. Mawhinney said a form of words was needed to get over the problem. Hume said he could not agree to any words implying doubt about the continuation of the talks. Nonetheless, Brooke tried a number of suggestions with him which were variations of the line Thomas discussed with me last week. These were in ascending order that the parties hoped/expected/agreed that, subject to consultation/after consultation, the talks would continue on the same basis after the election. Hume made it clear that he was not willing to engage in this exercise. The continuity of talks after the election had to be certain. Thomas said that Hume was so categorical that officials on the British side whispered "that's it" to themselves, meaning that the prospects for talks before the election were now gone.

Thomas said Hume's views seemed to have hardened between the meeting with the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice on Thursday last and the discussion with Brooke on Friday. I said I would not like to say it had hardened but Thomas' account was more precise and definite than I had understood to be the case although we had never left the British in any doubt about the depth of Hume's concern or his forcefulness with us on the matter. I took the opportunity to say that the SDLP had been alarmed by the stories emanating from London (Independent on Sunday, Sunday Tribune, today's London Times) to the effect that informal meetings had been arranged between the Conservatives and the Unionists with a view to a pact in the event of a hung parliament. Thomas thought this highly improbable although he saw the issue as a party political one of which he might not have knowledge. He did suggest, however, that the SDLP might be using the stories to divert attention from a position they had already taken.

Thomas said Brooke fully understood the substance of the SDLP's position and the issue of a change of administration was now going to be "a very difficult nut to crack".



Declan O'Donovan  
Joint Secretary

13 January, 1992