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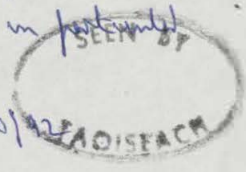
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Mr Sullivan
Mr. 11.11.92
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JH 30/10/92



cc. Counsellors
First Sec.
F. Hume
S. Hyder, D/I

FAX

To: Anglo-Irish Division
For: Pat Hennessey

From: Embassy London
From: Helena Nolan

Northern Ireland Questions
29 October, 1992

The first Northern Ireland Questions since the summer recess were fairly low-key but reasonably well attended, with the full NI front bench team facing their Labour Shadows. The UUP, including Molyneaux, were there in numbers and all the SDLP were present, apart from Hume. McCrea was present for the DUP.

The Talks

Kevin McNamara MP asked the Secretary of State to make a statement at the conclusion of the talks covering - the agreed positions of the parties, the Heads of Agreement, the areas of contention and the British Government's position on all these matters and to arrange for a debate before the Christmas recess. In his reply, Mayhew stressed the need for reticence and confidentiality but agreed that the House was entitled to "a sensible account" at the conclusion of the talks. Not wishing to be drawn on the question of "particularity", he felt it would be sensible for the parties to the talks to agree what kind of public statement can be made.

Mayhew was generally very positive about the outcome of the talks. Asked by David Winnick about the current position, he said that he was continuing to do all he could to achieve a positive conclusion, that all the parties had worked very hard and were continuing to do so. In his supplementary, Winnick asked whether Mayhew agreed that if the talks did fail, it would be important to have even closer links between the Republic and the British Government. Mayhew replied that he had been concentrating all his attention on the talks succeeding. However, if they did not reach Heads of Agreement, he would see this as "merely the arrival of another intermission in a process which has had a number of intermissions already and that the process would start again a good way down the road." In private conversation afterwards, Kevin McNamara remarked that Mayhew's very bullish attitude on the prospects for the talks seemed genuine on a private basis and that this had been reflected in a telephone conversation with him on Monday.

Questioned further on the deadline of November 16, Mayhew said this was the date of the next Inter-Governmental Conference under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. There had been two extensions to the gap and both Governments had agreed that the final extension would end on November 16. He still believed it was practically possible to reach Heads of Agreement within that time.

Seamus Mallon MP said, as one who had spent the past three years involved in the talks process, he felt it was time to know the British Government's mind on the fundamental question "Can we ever settle that problem on the basis of partition?" He asked if Mayhew agreed with a recent statement by the Foreign Secretary that the problem of Cyprus was not soluble on the basis of partition but only within the context of one sovereign Government. Avoiding a direct response, Mayhew commented that Mallon "had indeed been engaged in the talks a very long time and that his questions had become more and more ingenious." He reiterated his belief that it was possible to reach a successful conclusion within the time available and also within the constitutional guarantee of the 26 March 1991. This guarantee was the product of "very, very diligent consultation and discussion" in which the SDLP had taken part.

Ken Maginnis asked whether the Secretary of State would accept that it was "becoming virtually impossible to negotiate meaningfully with an Irish Government so acrimoniously divided by in-fighting and so obviously split on political and ethical attitudes?" Avoiding a direct reply, Mayhew said he felt Maginnis was taking "an uncharacteristically pessimistic view" and reiterated his earlier conviction on reaching Heads of Agreement.

Bill Walker MP (Cons), while wishing the talks well, queried the implications for Scotland if they led to anything beyond local government. Typically, Mayhew quipped that he was currently responsible for Northern Ireland and had no wish to enlarge his jurisdiction.

Andrew Hunter (Chairman of the NI Backbench Committee) suggested that while the talks were at this sensitive stage, all members could usefully urge the party leaders involved to work towards a positive conclusion and warned of the likely increase in violence following failure in the talks.

Articles 2 and 3

Questioned by John Taylor and Willie McCrea⁷ on Articles 2 and 3, Mayhew replied that the Government's viewpoint was well-known to the Irish Government and to the House and referred Taylor to the answer he gave Peter Robinson on 3 July last. Mayhew added that some considerable time ago the Taoiseach had said that Articles 2 and 3 would be on the table along with other constitutional matters. He was glad of this and full advantage was being taken in the talks to discuss these issues.

Questioned further, Mayhew replied that he would have to resist commenting and felt it was "far better to use the short time available negotiating privately and in quiet rather than commenting in public." Mallon intervened to ask the Secretary of State to confirm that "over a long period of time, four Irish Cabinet Ministers had been sitting at the table trying to get an agreed solution while others were sitting outside sniping on the wings." This rebuke was clearly aimed at John Taylor.

Security Cooperation

Asked whether closer cooperation with the intelligence services in the Irish Republic had contributed to the recent explosives find in East London, Mates replied that it was difficult for him to share intelligence matters with the House. However, he could say that cooperation with the Irish Government "had never been as good, was getting better all the time" and that this was also reflected in the major finds in the Republic. The increase in information from the general public was also

notable. The recent raid was also referred to during Prime Minister's Questions when the Prime Minister congratulated the Metropolitan Police on their good work.

Other matters discussed during NI Questions were - cross-border security, border crossings, education, financial support for terrorism, human rights, tourism and women's groups.

Maastricht

have decided to
In private conversation, Malton confirmed that the SDLP will reluctantly take the Labour Whip on the Maastricht vote next Wednesday. Indications are that the Unionists ~~will~~ vote against the Government, without having seen the text of the motion, with the exception of Jim Kilfedder who has already indicated that he would support the Government. This, however, will hardly endear the Unionists to the Labour Party who are said to be furious with their abstention last week on the pit-closures debate. During Prime Minister's questions, the PM indicated that the motion would be a substantive one. He is likely to outline the text at his meeting with the 1922 Committee tonight. The definitive text of the motion will be available tomorrow.