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Reference Code: 2021/94/8

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Taoiseach

To the press

52
11/2

cc PSM
PSS; Mr. M. H. L.
A/K. O. h. Uiginn
Joint Secretary
Conservative M.

Confidential

6 February 1992

Mr David Donoghue
Anglo Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs



Dear David

Brendan McMahon and I had dinner last night, 5 February, with Seamus Mallon at his request. The following is a rushed account of a few points which will be of interest to you;

- Mallon went on at length about the need for us to take the initiative and not, as he put it, be "led by the nose" by the British. This of course, is a familiar theme of his and one which as you know he likes resurrecting when events in NI are particularly bleak and his personal mood correspondingly down. What distinguished last night's conversation, however, from the usual format was the fact that he made it very clear that he intends to press his views with the new Taoiseach. According to Mallon, we should not delay awaiting the outcome of the next British election. Now is the time to consider the agenda, to determine what it is we want and how best to go about getting it. Neither the Conservatives or Labour know what to do with NI and as such are ready to respond to a strong lead. The election presents a golden opportunity to be grasped by the new Taoiseach. The opportunity must be seized and acted upon.
- Inevitably Hume's performance came under critical scrutiny. As I mentioned to you earlier in the week, I formed the impression that Mallon's annoyance with Hume has reached a new level of intensity in recent weeks. Last night, he broadened the scope of his attack. He referred, for example, to a private meeting which he claims Hume had with John Major shortly after Christmas. Hume he told us had set up this meeting without consulting anyone believing that he could move things forward on his own initiative in a private tete-a-tete with the Prime Minister. In the event, as Mallon could have told him, Brooke and Chilcott were present and Hume under pressure revealed all the SDLP's cards to the British side. Mallon was also highly critical of the manner in which Hume had handled the SDLP's contacts with us. There was a pressing need to put in place a much more structured and reliable method of coordination so that nationalist Ireland could speak with one strong unified voice.
- Another target of Mallon's invective was Peter Brooke, whom he argued had "conned us all". He was dismissive of the sympathy which Brooke's offer to resign had evoked being of the view that

his appearance on the "Late Late" show betrayed a fundamental lack of regard for NI. He was also inclined to view Brooke's offer to resign as a well timed, well calculated response, motivated by political necessity rather than by genuine remorse. We must not allow British politicians like Brooke, or even Kevin McNamara, to dictate our agenda.

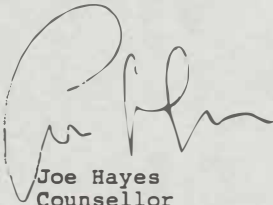
It was, as usual, difficult to form a clear picture of Mallon's thinking on the way forward. He is toying with a complicated idea whereby one could get agreement on strands one and two, put structures in place and allow the negotiating process to continue on the crunch issues of security, policing etc. One team would work the agreed structures internally and North/South allowing a separate body of negotiators to continue the talks on the other issues for however long it took with an inbuilt review process after say five years. He drew analogies with Sunningdale. One of the reasons for its failure had been the fact that people who had been negotiators on one day had been ministers operating the structures the next. I am not sure that I understood entirely what he was driving at, but in his scheme as I have reported it he clearly saw himself as one of the negotiators while others with a baser view of politics could draw the quick rewards of office.

He remains of the view that Labour will narrowly win the election. He detects a widespread mood in favour of change and believes that Labour will narrowly shade it in a three week campaign. If, however, the Tories are returned they will, he believes, quickly abandon the talks and opt for an imposed solution along the minimalist lines signalled in Brooke's "Walden" interview.

He had a great deal to say on a range of other issues. He spoke at length, for example, on the killings at the Sinn Fein headquarters where he believes the full story is still to be told. He also speculated on the outcome of the general election in NI, in particular, on the situation in West Belfast recounting his offer to fight the seat and Hume's rejection of his gesture which provided yet another example of the latter's failure to see what was best for the party as a whole!

Best regards

Yours sincerely



Joe Hayes
Counsellor