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29 September 1994

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
 Assistant Secretary
 Anglo-Irish Division
 Department of Foreign Affairs
 Dublin 2

Dear Assistant Secretary,

Meeting with the Presbyterian Moderator

The Joint Secretariat had a private meeting with the Presbyterian Moderator, Rev. David McGaughey, over lunch at Stormont today. The Moderator was accompanied by the Chief Clerk of the Assembly, Rev. Sam Hutchinson.

When he was elected in the summer, Mr. McGaughey was described to me by one of his colleagues as theologically conservative but reasonably open-minded on political matters. Openness of minded was none too evident to us but it may well be that he is not used to this sort of exchange. It gave some encouragement that he agreed to meet us, that he spoke frankly and appeared to listen carefully. He is a modest, quiet-voiced man with some humour, which I mention because it will not appear from the bleak summary of his presentation below. When we arrived at Stormont, we found that through a mix-up he and Mr. Hutchinson had been left to sit in a corridor while the British waited in a room within. The Moderator said dryly that they had followed the guard's instructions as "obedient presbyterians" and had waited to be summoned. They would have waited longer had we not rescued them.

In the line he took with us today, Mr McGaughey followed the Presbyterian Church and Government Committee statement of 15 September (copy attached) which he would have felt duty bound to do; but, in conversation, his own personal interventions were darker and contrasted with those of Mr. Hutchinson who, perhaps because he is the permanent element in the Presbyterian leadership, showed more understanding of the complexities of the situation. These were the Moderator's main points:

- There continues to be great doubt about the "permanence" of the IRA cessation. The IRA must renounce violence and demonstrate they have done so by handing in their arms and explosives and by disbanding. He strongly supported the British Government's line on this issue and hoped they would maintain it.

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(27)

cc PST

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

PSS; Finlay

BELFAST

MS O hUiginn (correct)

M Mansergh

Amb Lon

Counsellor AI

Confidential

- * Unionists had found the Taoiseach's early meeting with Gerry Adams "hurtful". They were surprised that within days of the IRA announcement, the Taoiseach should meet someone who had been so closely and publicly involved in the suffering inflicted on Northern Protestants over 25 years. In response, I said I hoped he would not think we were indifferent to that sensitivity. We were acutely conscious of it but we would ask him to reflect on the vital importance of bringing the men of violence into the democratic camp and making that irreversible. The Taoiseach's aim was permanent peace and an end to all the misery of the last 25 years. To receive Gerry Adams was not to agree with him; indeed, the Taoiseach and Adams had already publicly disagreed on the issue of when it might be feasible to look to a united Ireland.
- * Presbyterians are now anxiously waiting to see what lies in the framework document. They will be focusing in particular on constitutional status, on the North/South body and on policing. Any weakening of Northern Ireland's constitutional position would be unacceptable. Moreover, the Protestant community had strong emotional bonds with the RUC and would not want to see its name changed or any other important changes made there. I said both Governments had made their position clear on the question of change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and had said repeatedly that there would be no change in that position; that applied to the framework document and any other document that might be agreed between the Governments. I said a North/South body, established by the respective legislatures and accountable to them, made practical sense. As to policing, the framework document would not be going into detail on such matters; this would come up in later negotiations when the parties would be involved. I said, however, that the principle of parity of esteem would have to have practical application and that it was in everyone's interest that there should be a police force capable of commanding the full support of the community and drawing its membership from all sections of it.
- * The great majority of Presbyterians did not accept Dublin's interference (in case we should think the reference to the framework document implied some acceptance of it). There was resentment of our constant statements. The British Government governed them and no other. They saw no role for the American Government either and they feared that the British, who were now saying they were neutral, were being led by the nose by Dublin and the Americans in subtle ways. In exchanges, Mr. McGaughey held firm to these views but Mr. Hutchinson allowed that perhaps Northern Nationalists did require the confidence that Dublin's involvement gave them to agree and participate in new arrangements that Dublin had at times been helpful to Presbyterians. He mentioned contacts immediately prior to the Anglo-Irish Agreement

and support for the Presbyterian centre at Lucan), that support in America for republican violence had been drained by the joint approach of the two Governments and that while the US had not been a level playing field for Unionists in the past, the Americans seemed to be paying more attention to Unionist views now.

- * We did not understand the psyche of his "man in the back pew", by whom Mr. McGaughey meant the farmers and tradesmen who formed the majority of Presbyterians in the North of Ireland. He seemed to believe profoundly that there could never be a positive peace while one identity sought a united Ireland and the other never ceased to resist that ambition.
- * The absence of a local administration had caused the more able Unionists to pursue their own affairs rather than enter politics but representatives were now emerging from the grassroots who were better at articulating the Unionist position. He did not mean they would be flexible or willing to compromise; the professional and middle-classes might see scope for compromise, but their view was not shared by the majority.
- * He favoured the fullest possible devolution of powers by the British Government. Mr. Hutchinson favoured limited devolution initially on matters that were least contentious such as agriculture; with increasing cooperation and trust more could be devolved later.
- * He was not reassured by the Joint Declaration or by the many statements that had been made by the two Governments on the principle of consent. The majority of Presbyterians saw Sunningdale, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Joint Declaration as "paving stones" to a united Ireland. Mr. McGaughey recalled that some time ago a representative of the NIC had told Presbyterian Ministers including himself, in the very room we were meeting, that you might kill your enemy in two ways: you might go out and slay him or you might administer poison gradually drop by drop. He had foretold that Nationalists would cease to go out and slay their enemies but would turn instead to slowly poisoning them. That man had been shown to be a prophet. Many believed that this was exactly what was happening now.
- * I sought to persuade the Moderator that the almost universal consensus that now exists in the South on the principle of consent was a major achievement of recent years. His answer, produced in the manner of a trump card, was the McGimpsey judgement. Intelligent, professional men like Robert McCartney had brought the phrase "constitutional imperative" to public attention and shown that it placed a binding obligation on all servants of the Irish State to pursue the objective set out in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. I said we

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had declared a willingness to change the Constitution in the context of an overall settlement but that, in any event, the important points in the McGimpey judgement were the reaffirmation of the State's obligation to act by peaceful means exclusively and the upholding of the principle of consent contained in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Mr. McCartney might have a view on what was meant by constitutional imperative but the Court had not set it out. The means of pursuing the goal of a united Ireland under the Constitution was a matter for policy decision by Government, provided the means was peaceful, and the Government had made their policy clear.

* He did not know how Unionists could be reassured. Some reassurance had been given by the Prime Minister's promise of a referendum. He did not think any reassurances of ours could help; as he had said earlier, he did not think Irish statements showed any sense of understanding the "man in the back pew", or for that matter, those such as himself at the front of the congregation. I repeated that there would be no change in the position taken by the two Governments on the constitutional position. If there were things he thought we could say that would be helpful, I invited him to tell us. For the rest, we could only continue to pursue the peace process, to stress the principle of consent and ask him to reflect on how Nationalists might see the situation. Should they be expected to abandon their identity? Or accept a secondary status within Northern Ireland? Or be prevented from ties with the South that would be natural and mutually beneficial in any event?

* Mr. Hutchinson suggested that before the joint framework document was published, it would be a good idea to test it on Protestant representatives (he may have wished to include himself in this). He was not thinking of any form of negotiation, rather that phrases or expressions that might cause unnecessary offence should be avoided. The main churches often exchanged draft statements for this purpose before they were finalised.

We parted on good terms and with expressions of desire to stay in touch, in particular from Mr. Hutchinson. Mr. McGaughey said he would launch a Presbyterian peace initiative at his own church in Kilkeel this evening. One of the elements will be an arrangement for at least one of the more than 500 Presbyterian churches in Ireland to be open each day of the year for the purpose of prayers for peace.

Yours sincerely,



Declan O'Donovan
Joint Secretary