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TAOISEACH

A meeting with Eddie McGrady

Discreet
You may wish to
see points highlighted

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I met Eddie McGrady in Downpatrick on 7 October.

The following points of interest arose:

IRA ceasefire

- McGrady does not see this as the culmination of a personal initiative which Gerry Adams took with the Army Council. Rather, it was "the other way round": the Army Council took a decision at least two years ago to go for an unarmed strategy and Adams has been simply the tool of this policy ever since.
- This explains such anomalies as a Sinn Fein conference effectively rejecting the Declaration and an IRA ceasefire following within weeks. The Hume/Adams talks essentially amounted to "going through the motions": the decision, in McGrady's view, had already been taken.
- Rehearsing a familiar theme, McGrady criticised his party leader's apparent "subservience" to Adams and his unwillingness to say anything which might be construed as criticism of Sinn Fein.
- He also had reservations about the degree of access afforded to Adams in the United States and the timing of Adams' meeting with the Taoiseach and Hume ("when the blood had hardly dried").
- I impressed on McGrady that certain consequences flowed logically from the judgment reached by the Government about the ceasefire, a judgment which his own party leader shared, and from the urgent need to consolidate the peace process.
- McGrady acknowledged that there has indeed been an enormous improvement on the ground in Northern Ireland since the ceasefire ("a huge burden has been lifted from our shoulders"). In his area there has been a palpable relaxation of the atmosphere, with Unionists and

nationalists conversing more easily together than they have done for years.

- Unionist politicians, however, are running around "like headless chickens", unsure how to respond to the new situation and sensing that nationalists have gained the advantage over them in ways which have yet to become apparent.
- He noted in this respect Molyneaux's almost total silence since 1 September.

Political talks

- McGrady had a number of questions about the Government's intentions in relation to the framework document, including the question of how it might be deployed eventually with the parties.
- I briefed him in general terms both on the substance of the draft and on the Government's thinking about its deployment and he was in complete agreement on all points.
- His particular concern was that the document would be made public before the Forum got underway (and be available, accordingly, as the "effective agenda" for the latter).
- Picking up the Prime Minister's signalling of a referendum in Northern Ireland on a future draft agreement, he observed that there was no sign of Sinn Fein shifting from the position that the only legitimate outcome would be the cumulative majority preference expressed by taking the separate referenda North and South together.
- He also underlined the capacity of the DUP to alarm the Unionist population to a point where the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland even to something which the UUP had supported in round-table talks could not be taken for granted.

Security matters

- McGrady complained at excessive security force presence in parts of Co. Down where there has never been a problem with paramilitary violence in the past.

- He was strongly supportive of Seamus Mallon's ideas for the creation of a number of regionalised and unarmed police forces (though with certain centralised functions retained, e.g. the forensic service or procurement).
- He would like to see the SDLP and the Government advance fully developed proposals on this subject as quickly as possible. One concern he has is that, if the initiative is not seized in this area, Sinn Fein and the IRA will have an opportunity to infiltrate the RUC in its present formation and to "undermine it from within" in preparation for any possible resumption of IRA violence.

Local government

- McGrady understands that Minister Tim Smith has plans to establish a NI Planning Commission (involving Councillors appointed by the British Government).
- He sees this as a first step towards the transfer of planning responsibility to the Councils (something which the British Government has reportedly been considering for some time as a concession to the Molyneux agenda).

Boundary Commission

- He has heard on good authority (but asked me to keep this confidential for the time being) that the assessor for his and Seamus Mallon's constituencies, James Fee, has recommended the retention of Newry-Armagh and South Down in roughly their present configurations. In his own case, he would lose the Northern part of the constituency (Banbridge), a prospect which does not greatly trouble him.
- It is, of course, still open to the Commission to turn down the recommendations made. If that were to happen, however, McGrady would seek a judicial review of the decision on South Down, arguing that the statutory criteria had not been followed and, if necessary, introducing evidence of the Fee recommendation.
- There remains, of course, the difficulty that some constituencies in Northern Ireland must be modified. McGrady has heard criticism of the SDLP for not proposing alternative approaches. As far as he is concerned, "the place to begin is North Antrim".

- He has the impression that, for reasons connected with proposed boundary changes in Scotland (where some sitting Tory MPs could be ousted), the British Government will be in no hurry to finalize the overall recommendations during this Parliament.

- I told McGrady of the points which the Tanaiste has made in the Conference framework, most recently at the IGC on 23 September, and he was very appreciative.

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
11 October 1994