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Meeting between the Tanaiste and the UUP

Washington, Friday, 26th May

29/5

1. At the Tanaiste's request, a meeting with the UUP delegation took place in the Sheraton Hotel on Friday, 26th May.

Present were:

Government side: Tanaiste, Ambassador Gallagher, Mr. Fergus Finlay and the undersigned.

UUP side: Mr. Willie Ross, MP, Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson.

2. After introductory courtesies there was some general discussion on the economic objectives of the Conference. Mr. Ross spoke of some inhibitions on developing the tourist trade: the short season which resulted in high accommodation costs. He mentioned also a number of problems with the angling industry, particularly the use of nets.
3. Mr. Ross pronounced himself very satisfied with President Clinton's speech. It put it up to Adams, who had "foosthered around" for the last nine months. Sinn Fein were engineering street confrontation during the marching season. He felt strongly that police strategy should be to put the parades through the designated routes quickly, and be done with the matter. The Tanaiste objected that some of the parades could be provocative and asked whether such manifestations could not now be profitably dispensed with on all sides. Mr. Ross strongly supported the Orange position in relation to the Ormeau Road, maintaining that that route was unavoidable in order to cross the bridge. Unfortunately Sinn Fein wanted confrontation with the police.

4. The Tanaiste set out in some detail the thinking behind the Irish Government's approach and the model which they envisaged for an accommodation (new institutions with Northern Ireland, between North and South, between East and West, etc). Mr. Ross expressed his concern at the advances made by Sinn Fein. He said that various SDLP figures were also deeply worried at this development. The unionists saw themselves as having made endless concessions. Paisley bound together Loyalism and unionist sentiment. Unionists were not now being allowed to defend the union. If there were new institutions, Adams, or his successors, would use them to undermine the union.

5. The Tanaiste stressed the sea-change which had taken place in Southern politics. There would be no aggression against Northern Ireland and everything would be down to the way the people there voted. O hUiginn stressed that the approach offered the unionists something they could never achieve for themselves, i.e. total nationalist acceptance of their position in the union for as long as there was a majority for that purpose.

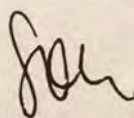
6. Mr. Ross argued strongly that the proposed new structures would be unstable and incoherent because of the constitutional divide built into them. They did not accept, as the Irish side suggested, that that issue could be managed under new agreed ground rules. He had seen at the Church of Ireland Synod and elsewhere that there were indeed changes in the South, but anticipated future tensions between the post-religious outlook of the urban centres and the Catholic and conservative views of the rural hinterlands.

7. The Tanaiste sought to persuade him that the essence of political leadership was to take difficult decisions, e.g. about a local school or hospital, and that there was no

reason why these should not be tackled just as determinedly under new institutions in Northern Ireland as they would be e.g. by an Irish Cabinet in relation to his own constituency. Mr. Ross, however, was not to be budged from his pessimistic views.

8. At the end of the meeting, which lasted about an hour, it was agreed that it would be important to stay in touch. Mr. Ross seemed to accept that this could include some follow-up on the Conference.

9. (Note: In a private conversation with me afterwards, Mr. Donaldson said that Mr. Ross had, in fact, found the meeting interesting and was particularly pleased at the Tanaiste's "straight talking". I gathered Ross had also had a useful conversation the previous evening with Deputy Semour Crawford, who had argued strongly that a reasonable deal was on offer and that it should be done with the Taoiseach and Tanaiste in the lifetime of the present Government. Mr. Donaldson thought it would be worthwhile to follow-up, as the Tanaiste had suggested, on the fishing issues raised by Mr. Ross. He also agreed with me that it would be worth exploring the possibility of some collective follow-up on the occasion of Senator Mitchell's visit in June).



Sean O hUiginn
29 May, 1995