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Reference Code: 2021/100/18

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Discussions between SDLP and UUP on North/South

cc Group 1, Mr Kivona / Mr Hesse
Section, Mr T. Jordan D/F
Mr N. Flintham, Legal Adviser
Mr O'Donoghue
File

1. Denis Haughey telephoned me last evening to report on a further meeting he and Sean Farren had yesterday with the UUP on North/South Bodies. The UUP was represented by John Taylor, Esmond Birnie and Dennis Kennedy. This was, overall, a more positive meeting than previous such occasions. It will be recalled that the UUP had, at the instigation of adviser, Austen Morgan, proposed a number of minimalist bodies, including a number which had the focus on a technical copper-fastening of the border between North and South! Interestingly, Morgan was not present on this occasion and the Bodies he had proposed were not mentioned.
2. Instead, the UUP proposed an approach whereby the two sides would seek to agree four areas which they had in common and submit those for technical assessment by the Northern Ireland Departments. At the same time, each side could submit to Departments for similar technical assessment, three or four other areas. It was agreed that Sean Farren and Esmond Birnie would meet tomorrow, Wednesday, to reach agreement on the four "common" areas. As matters stand, two of these would be Agriculture (to be defined) and the Environment (to be defined).
3. The UUP suggested that the process of technical assessment should be completed by the end of next week (16 October), at which point the two sides would meet again, with David Trimble and Seamus Mallon present. The next step they suggested was (more problematically) a "quadripartite" meeting, involving the SDLP, the UUP and the two Governments.
4. At this point, Denis Haughey telephoned me for our sense. I suggested that,

while it was very encouraging that the UUP was beginning to talk in more serious terms about the nature and scope of Bodies, there would be political difficulties about any meeting between North and South which seemed to exclude Sinn Féin. Denis agreed, recalling Séamus Mallon's insistence that he would not assent to a meeting between North and South at which he and David Trimble would represent the Northern side. Denis and Sean Farren subsequently conveyed to Esmond Birnie their sense that while they could agree to the steps proposed up to and including a meeting between David Trimble and Seamus Mallon on the matter, the issue of other meetings beyond that would require further consideration by the party. The planned meeting between Sean Farren and Esmond Birnie is to go ahead tomorrow.

Comment

5. Notwithstanding the dimension of "try-on" on the part of the UUP in regard to a North/South meeting that excluded Sinn Féin, this is an encouraging development. The discussions between the UUP and the SDLP have now moved into more serious mode on North/South. The pulling back from the "Morgan approach" by the UUP may also reflect some private contacts we have made with senior party figures to that effect.



T O'Connor

6 October 1998