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~~Mr HAT~~ 1) HAT 2) Mrs HAT

agree with all of this (C) 24/1

Goodall
Mr Clark or

FROM: C D O Barrie
Republic of Ireland
Department

DATE: 18 January 1984

AIRLIE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON NORTHERN IRELAND: WARRENTON, VIRGINIA 6-9
JANUARY 1985

A 1. I attach copies of the records circulated by Mr Lyon and Sir Ken
B Bloomfield which give an admirable account of the conference. There
is little point in repeating points which they have already made but
it may be helpful if I offer a few additional observations by way of
amplification. You may also find it helpful to see the list of
C D participants and the programme which I attach.

Yes. 2. Like Mr Lyon and Sir K Bloomfield my overall impression of the
conference was that the spokesmen of Irish nationalism had, on most
points, been out-performed and out-argued by the unionist
representatives. Peter Robinson and his DUP colleagues were
Yes particularly impressive: they spoke fluently and had evidently
prepared themselves with great thoroughness. The UUP delegation
presented a less united front and the absence of any representatives
of the integrationist wing of the party was, as Sir K Bloomfield
says, very noticeable. But both groups succeeded in appearing more
reasonable and open-minded than the SDLP team (Austin Currie came
over well in his few interventions but left Hume and Mallon to make
the running). It remains to be seen whether the appearance of
flexibility on the part of the unionists survives their return to
Northern Ireland.

3. The unionist representatives concentrated their attention on two
main issues: the meaning of the principle of consent and the need
for talks between the unionist and nationalist political parties
within Northern Ireland. They brought out clearly the inconsistency
and vagueness of the Forum Report on the subject of consent. Jim
Allister (DUP) summed up the contents of the Forum Report brutally
but not entirely inaccurately by saying that it offered "any sort of
Ireland provided it's united". Bob McCartney (UUP) argued that the

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ence from the Forum Report of an unambiguous definition of what was meant by consent appeared to be the result of deliberate obfuscation. The unionists harried the SDLP by arguing that if they accepted the formulation on consent contained in the Summit Communiqué which Dr FitzGerald had signed in November, they must surely be prepared to enter into talks with the unionists without setting pre-conditions about the need to alter the constitutional status of the province.

4. John Hume clearly felt unable to give an undertaking that the SDLP would engage in such talks though he looked distinctly uncomfortable about it. He repeated the usual arguments about the need to "widen the context of the problem" and seek a solution that would command the consent of the people not just in Northern Ireland but also in the Republic and Great Britain as well. He appeared *Yes* evasive and unconvincing.

5. The unionists insisted, despite sceptical comments from the nationalist side, that provided the latter were prepared to accept the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, they would be willing to agree to measures aimed at accommodating the minority community's desire to express their 'Irishness'. Allister pointed out acerbically that this was just what the "minority" in the South had done since partition. McCartney spoke of the need to build political structures "from the bottom up" in order to find ways of allowing both communities to participate in "functional politics". If this was to work, it was essential to avoid trying to impose "doctrinaire constitutional views".

6. Peter Smith (UUP) picked up the idea of a Bill of Rights which he said would be seriously on offer in any talks that might take place. He urged the SDLP to come to the conference table with their "shopping list". Peter Robinson (DUP) said that neither side should set pre-conditions for talks: both sides could say whatever they liked. He insisted that there were many ways in which the minority could have an effective say in the running of Northern Ireland "without power-sharing". He also said, revealingly, that the reason why many unionists wanted the SDLP to come to the conference table was in order to contain the political progress of Sinn Fein. Sam

Olson (DUP) and Harold McCusker (UUP) were amongst those on the unionist side who saw advantage in closer cooperation between North and South on matters that would be of mutual benefit - with the inevitable proviso that they should not be set in the context of progress towards unity.

7. There was a striking degree of unanimity amongst the unionists on the significance of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. McCartney described these Articles as offering "legitimacy to the gunmen". Peter Robinson referred to them as "absurd, arrogant and illegal" and Jim Allister said that as far as he was concerned, the various "confessional" aspects of the Irish Constitution (eg the ban on divorce) were of more academic than real interest to him. (A view not shared by McCartney who laid great emphasis on the need for pluralism, North and South - see paragraph 12 below.) Allister's only demand was that the Irish should remove Articles 2 and 3.

8. I was particularly suprised that Peter Robinson recognised the Irish Government's right to be "interested and concerned" in the affairs of Northern Ireland. He even went so far as to say that if they were to be involved in altering their Constitution they could reasonably demand a say in any negotiations regarding a settlement in Northern Ireland. Similarly McCartney indicated that the Irish Government had a "legitimate interest in helping to resolve the problem". (I overheard Harold McCusker muttering that this was only McCartney's personal view!)

9. It would be wrong to give the impression that the unionists did all the talking. Apart from the SDLP, there was no shortage of spokesmen for the nationalist cause. But there was little new in what they said and they all adopted a rather self-righteous tone about the remarkable breakthrough which they claimed the Forum Report represented as well as complaining about HMG's alleged failure to respond adequately to it. They also had difficulty in responding effectively to the well-aimed criticisms offered by the unionist side.

He warned that there was a danger of resurrecting old conflicts if the Republic tried to alter Articles 2 and 3 and

final remarks during the wrap-up session struck a distinctly gloomy note: he said that a "very, very wide gap" still existed between the two sides and that while everybody seemed to want to talk, they all wanted to talk "about different things". Seamus Mallon spoke with his usual passion and conviction though not always very coherently. But he showed no sign of flexibility and dismissed the possibility of a successful internal settlement saying that there was "no such thing".

10. Of the Irish Government representatives, Michael Noonan (Minister for Justice) gave a wooden and unimpressive performance relying heavily on quotations from the Forum Report. He argued that any initiative which aimed merely at improving security cooperation would be doomed to failure. He showed little ability to respond to the cut and thrust of the debate. Ruairi Quinn (Minister for Labour) was more nimble and helped to encourage unionist expansiveness by acknowledging freely the shortcomings of the Irish Republic and the nationalist tradition. In particular he admitted without equivocation that the people of the Republic would not be prepared to pay the massive bill for Irish unity.

11. Des O'Malley (Independent Fianna Fail) led the "unofficial" Fianna Fail delegation. He took a tough line on the alleged failings of British security policy but acknowledged that public policy and private morality should be "much more clearly separated" in the Republic. He leant towards the possibility of a federal/confederal solution as being the least unsatisfactory. There was some debate about whether any agreement reached between the present British and Irish Governments would stick if Mr Haughey returned to power. Interestingly, Maurice Manning (Fine Gael) - one of Mr Haughey's more outspoken critics - argued forcefully that his fundamental pragmatism would prevent him going back on anything that had been achieved.

12. McCartney put forward a stirring synthesis during the final session. He said that there were two problems: the tactical one of how the various parties could reach agreement on a solution. This he said would have to be done within the parameters of the Summit Communiqué. But there was also the need to develop a strategic

policy under which Irish unity might eventually be contemplated. It was vital to avoid cutting off the nationalist community's long-term aspiration which should, he said, be placed in the context of a new secular creed for a pluralist Ireland. He argued that by adopting this approach it might be possible to achieve the conditions in which progress could be made towards a long-term settlement.

13. One or two disconnected observations: Ken Maginnis (UUP) said that at the time when the RUC was first established there had been a provision which reserved one third of the jobs in the force for Catholics. He claimed that the minority had failed to take advantage of this with the results which we see today. (This was new to me and I shall be checking its accuracy with the NIO. If true, it might make quite a useful propaganda point.) Harold McCusker has still not forgotten your alleged remarks on the significance of Irish neutrality at the BIA conference in 1983: he brought them up again as evidence of the strategic importance of Northern Ireland to HMG. I am glad to say that this thesis found very little support.

14. Although the audience was not a large one, it included representatives of a wide range of interests and geographical localities in the United States. It is hard to imagine a more effective way of educating outsiders on the "realities" of the situation in Northern Ireland, though it has to be said that the unionists were very much on their best behaviour. We should therefore be grateful to Professor O'Malley.

David Barrie

C D O Barrie

cc HMA, Dublin
Mr Lyon, NIO
Mr Sheinwald, Washington
Mr Beattie, BIS New York