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M. Smyth
5/11

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J.H. S.

Meeting between Taoiseach and Reverend Martin Smyth

1. The following is a summary of the main points arising in a discussion which the Taoiseach had with Rev. Martin Smyth today. In view of the nature of the meeting it would not have been appropriate to take detailed notes of the discussion.

2. Articles 2 and 3

Rev. Smyth referred to a "Day by Day" radio programme which he participated in recently and in which he made his views known on this question (transcript is being obtained). He had welcomed any changes in the constitution which would benefit the people of the South. He made specific reference to the Taoiseach in his radio interview last Sunday addressing himself to the Protestant people of Northern Ireland rather than the Unionist community. The Taoiseach referred to the fact that he had met many protestant people in Northern Ireland over the years who were prepared to consider a new relationship with the South and who wished to find a permanent solution to the situation. Rev. Smyth made the point that Unionists would not change their position and would wish to remain part of the U.K. However there was nothing in Unionism according to Rev. Smyth that precluded the development of good neighbourly relations and this was something that could be developed. Rev. Smyth referred to the two previous Oireachtas committees which had considered the constitutional issue and the lack of progress arising from them. The Taoiseach explained the background to the lack of progress resulting from Fianna Fail opposition and indicated that he had begun a campaign and that he would try and give a lead and bring public opinion to a stage where it might be possible to hold a referendum which had a prospect of succeeding. A referendum could not be held which would fail. There had unfortunately been an increase in the South in the degree of alienation of people to Northern Ireland and its problems. This was something that had to be tackled also. Rev. Smyth brought up the question of what form the proposed change of Articles 2 and 3 would take and referred to a suggestion by J.J. Taylor that it could be of an "aspiration to unity by consent" nature. The Taoiseach indicated that whatever about the precise wording it would be a major advance if the aspiration to unity could be expressed in peaceful terms and provide the basis for eventual progress in that spirit.

3. OUP Meeting with Secretary of State

Jim Molyneaux and Sir George Clark had met the new Secretary of State and had strongly argued for the restoration of devolved government of a majority rule nature. This had come as a surprise according to Rev. Smyth to Mr. Prior and his civil servants. Rev. Smyth said that NIO officials had been attempting to develop an anti-integrationist and a stronger pro-devolution lobby in the OUP. The NIO had been surprised at how successful they were. He related the story that Sir George Clark had indicated to Mr. Prior that after the next Westminster election a situation could arise where alliances might need to be made and would the Conservatives be prepared to invite Tony Benn into the Cabinet. Mr. Prior said that Tony Benn was opposed to everything he and Sir George Clark stood for. Sir George Clark then asked why they should ask John Hume to participate in a Northern Ireland Government.

4. OUP - DUP relationship

The Taoiseach asked Rev. Smyth about the present relationship between the OUP and DUP. Rev. Smyth said that together the two parties represented the broad mass of unionist opinion and made the point that not all unionists distinguished between voting for the OUP or DUP at election time. However, basically the two parties are opponents. The Taoiseach referred to the inability of the OUP to get across to the public the fact that it was the largest party and that it had had considerable success in maintaining its position. Every election was portrayed as a victory for Paisley and the DUP. Rev. Smyth claimed that it was primarily a media problem and gave several instances where Jim Molyneaux had had difficulty in getting time on TV or radio. The clear implication was that Paisley was regarded as a more news worthy personality with the result that the media tended to neglect the OUP position.

5. Rev. Smyth indicated that the Taoiseach's interest in OUP/DUP contact might have been aroused by stories circulating about a joint OUP/DUP visit to the USA to explain the Unionist point of view. The origin of this had been a Newsletter article calling for the Unionist point of view to be made known. Rev. Paisley had a six-minute conversation with James Molyneaux recently in which he proposed a joint expedition to the U.S. James Molyneaux said he would consider the proposal. In the meantime it had become clear that John Taylor was interested (a joint visit of Northern Unionist MEP's being the theme) with perhaps Rev. Robert Bradford and Peter Robinson also in attendance. Rev. Smyth said that Bradford for "reasons best known to himself" had a tendency in the direction of the DUP. Rev. Smyth and the OUP (Executive of the OUP has not approved) are taking steps to prevent OUP involvement in such a trip. The Taoiseach commented that it would be counter-productive in terms of Irish/American opinion for Paisley and Robinson to appear in the U.S. Rev. Smyth felt that while such trips could be useful in reaching the broad spectrum of U.S. opinion, they needed to be well organised and planned in advance. He referred with obviously some approbation to the State Department decision to exclude the DUP (Peter Robinson in particular) from the visit which Hendron, Napier and McCusker have just made to the U.S.

6. Anglo-Irish Studies

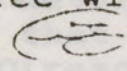
Rev. Smyth referred to the joint studies and said that he had heard that they had primarily been a civil service exercise concerned with the development and improvement of relations between the two countries on a practical level with the possibility of an institutional structure being set up. The Taoiseach said that he of course was bound by an agreement between his predecessor and Mrs. Thatcher that secrecy would be maintained in relation to the studies. While much of the work had to be done at official level it could only be brought to a certain stage at which political decisions were required. Even purely practical, economic questions such as a Wales-Wexford electricity inter-connector because of the large investment involved, required a political decision. Similarly in relation to the setting up of some institutional structure between the two countries it could only be brought to a certain stage at official level. He would be meeting Mrs. Thatcher and these other issues would have to be considered at that level. The Taoiseach referred to various institutional structures between other countries (Nordic Union and Benelux countries) and said

that the special relationship between the two countries would require a suitable structure. He referred to the possibility of having a parliamentary wing or element in any new structure and the hope that Northern politicians could be involved in such a structure. Rev. Smyth appeared to be sceptical of such involvement where there was no locally elected administration in Northern Ireland from which to draw such representation.

7. Referring back to the radio programme mentioned in para. 2 above, Rev. Smyth said that Brian Lenihan who had also participated in the radio show had spoken of "visions" of an all Ireland united etc. but Rev. Smyth could also have visions of a federation involving the two islands.

8. Towards the conclusion of the meeting, Rev. Smyth referred to a Southern politician who "shall be nameless" who had said that the Taoiseach was not a "nationalist" at all. Rev. Smyth jokingly said that he considered the Taoiseach the most dangerous form of nationalist possible (from a Unionist perspective).

9. In relation to security matters, the Taoiseach made the point that the IRA could only be defeated in the context of an all Ireland authority for law enforcement in which the two police forces were integrated and the border did not hinder the police. It was obvious that Rev. Smyth while seeing the security benefits of this could not agree with the proposal in political terms.

Martin Burke 

1 October 1981

c.c. PSM
P/S to the Taoiseach
Mr. Nally
Mr. Neligan.