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From: Allen McVeigh
Political Affairs Division
16 December 1997

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Mr. McVeigh

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cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Bell
Mr Stephens
Mr Leach
Mr Watkins
Mr Hill
Mr Brooker
Mr Ferguson
Mr Perry
Mrs Collins
Mr Fergusson, RID
Mr Canavan
Mr Warner

Julie

Political Talks file for
these papers (769/97).

Mr 'x' office.

4000 Mr. Garry Bole.

29/12

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP FORUM ON 11 DECEMBER: NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE - AN SDLP VIEW

The third in ECONI's series of Christian Fellowship Forums took place at the Belfast YMCA on Thursday night, with Sean Farren presenting an SDLP viewpoint (See also copy of SDLP press release) on "Negotiating the Future". The panel for the subsequent questioning comprised Sammy Douglas (community), Trevor Williams (church) and Gordon Lucy (politician). Unfortunately, the audience numbers was well down - around 25 only - reflecting in part diversions such as Christmas shopping but also one suspects the general apathy to the political process that was alluded to by Sammy Douglas (see para 13) during the question time. The following may be of interest.

Summary

2. A standard, polished SDLP presentation, containing few surprises, from a confident Sean Farren who desired, as might be anticipated, maximum progress for a nationalist agenda, with a substantial Strand 2 dimension to tie into any agreement. Fears and uncertainties of Unionists aired through their questions, which were largely directed at themselves more than the SDLP but left unanswered.

Detail

3. Following the normal opening by way of biblical reflection from Deuteronomy by one of the ECONI team - this month considering the instruction to 'love the alien (stranger)' - the floor was given over to Sean Farren. Before his address he paid tribute to the growing involvement of civic society in the political process in recent years, which he welcomed, and singled out in particular the trade unions, the G7 and ECONI for praise.

Sean Farren

Totality of relationships

4. Sticking mainly to the prepared script, he said that the negotiations were "the product of a long and difficult process of rethinking and reworking the political basis to the relationships between the peoples of Ireland and Britain". Steps along the way had included the New Ireland Forum, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration and the Dublin Forum, out of all of which had come important elements to, hopefully, produce a settlement from the present negotiations. Central to all these initiatives was the '**totality of relationships**', first coined at the Thatcher/Haughey Dublin Summit of 1980. The negotiations seek to produce a set of agreed political institutions to give expression to those relationships as well as a resolution to a range

of issues (including decommissioning, prisoners, etc) as an outcome: the seeking of such agreement is an immense challenge.

New Ireland

5. The SDLP's overall approach is to seek a resolution to the conflict between the nationalist and unionist identities, believing this can best be found in a 'New (Agreed) Ireland', as set out and accepted by the overwhelming majority within the broad nationalist tradition in Ireland (ie all but Sinn Fein) in the 1983/84 New Ireland Forum, which accommodates the two sets of legitimate rights of nationalists and unionists, but only by agreement and consent. Post-Nationalist Europe was cited as a good example (on more than one occasion!) to follow.

Strand 2

6. Returning to the totality of relationships, he mentioned the North/South Strand 2 as the one currently causing most problems (Strand 1 was causing little difficulty at present - though he was not so sure it wouldn't do so later on - mainly due to 'shared assumptions' to date on the part of the SDLP and UUP but not SF, and Strand 3 was where most advances had been made ever since the AIA: both the IGC and BIIPB were mentioned and could, he said, be built upon: the Nordic Council was suggested as a possible model for any broadened Body bringing in also the Scots and Welsh). The goal in Strand 2, at least as far as the SDLP (and Irish Government) was concerned, was not domination but co-operation for the mutual benefit of everyone on the island: a practical requirement would be for all decisions in the North/South body to be consensually based, along the lines of the SDLP's preferred model of the European Council of Ministers. There would also be a requirement of the representatives of the Body to consult with their respective administrations, to ensure that the proper authority exists before any decisions are taken. This would also mean its pace and development would be determined largely by its (slower) members. That said, he made no bones about this being a key area to be addressed to the SDLP's satisfaction.

Possible Strand 2 agenda

7. It may also be worth mentioning that the SDLP see many of the recommendations made to the Dublin Forum, from North and South organisations covering improved infrastructure; harmonising health and education; promoting trade at home and abroad; developing agriculture and tourism etc, providing a ready made agenda to occupy the North/South Body for many years ahead.

Rights: Human and Cultural

8. There was the now familiar argument (but short on detail) for strong and effective measures for the protection of human rights, drawing on international laws and conventions to put into a legal framework such as a Bill of Rights. Allied to this was fundamental changes to policing, which was of crucial significance in obtaining a political settlement which would win widespread support: this, he argued, would be a key focus in the negotiations. The SDLP found it invidious that the people who elected them were not participating in a police service tasked to defend the political institutions envisaged coming from the negotiations. The fifty years of unionist misrule with its failure to ensure parity of esteem had left a bitter legacy which needed to be addressed. Others, he said, had exploited cultural rights in a malign way. (Comment: that is not in the press release). The respect and esteem for the Irish language and culture sought by the SDLP should not be seen as a threat but adding to cultural diversity and richness overall.

Equality and Equity: Social and Economic Development

9. There must be no second class citizens: the SDLP will be urging that the principles in the EU's Social Chapter should be endorsed within the context of a settlement. Furthermore, a settlement which did not lay the basis for eliminating the inequities and injustice of a society of 'haves' and 'have nots' would hardly be a desirable outcome. The approach to economic development, in the view of the SDLP,

is based on a North/South partnership encompassing the whole range of socio-economic and business relationships on the Island.

Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)

10. CBMs included decommissioning, treatment and release of prisoners, 'missing persons' and day to day policing with the former top of the list. The SDLP's position was fully in accord with the Mitchell Report, ie acceptance of the need to advance decommissioning during, rather than before (now past) or after, the negotiations.

Panel Questions

11. Trevor Williams indicated he had heard a lot about the SDLP's plan for the negotiations but wondered should they not (like Mandela in South Africa) have first found a partner to make the plan work. Fully aware that he was referring to the UUP, Sean suggested that the UUP needed to build a positive relationship with both the British and Ireland Governments first and foremost; he cited the SDLP's (almost total) detachment from September last year to August this year during the decommissioning debate; also on Strand 2 it was the Dublin Government the UUP had to look to and establish a relationship with rather than the SDLP. When pressed, however, he did agree that the SDLP should seek to assure the UUP whenever possible.

7 12. Gordon Lucy, after first explaining that he was at best a 'semi-detached UUP member', suggested the SDLP's European model of integration and harmonisation went against unionist thinking. The UUP preferred to look to Eastern not Western Europe, he said. This sparked a mini debate between Sean and himself: the former talking about a husband and wife team - who didn't want to share one house, said Lucy - living apart was no longer a political option - neighbours was Lucy's preferred analogy - neighbours with a fence but also a gate so that they could come and go, said Sean. The chair intervened after a while to allow Sammy Douglas his question.

Working (and non-working) class unionist apathy

13. Douglas, picking up on earlier references to the involvement of civil society, indicated that in his experience (which is not insignificant) grassroots Unionists on the Newtownards Road, Ballybeen, Tullycarnet, etc were disaffected and, as a consequence, apathetic to the Talks. He wondered too how many of the G7 had ever visited the Newtownards Road? He had never seen a politician out at 3 or 4 in the morning when it most counted, helping quell community tensions. Meetings behind closed doors at Stormont was only storing up problems and he pleaded for a simple but effective way to involve or at least inform those who mattered from East Belfast. He spoke also about the growing alienation among those out of work and working class unionists and slipped in a supplementary question, pleading for CBMs for Unionists from the SDLP. He also noted the worrying trend on fragmenting Unionists, Loyalist paramilitaries and now the Orange Order.

14. Sean explained that a popular debate was not feasible in his view and said that it had been found that even 50 or so round the table had proved to be too cumbersome, so much so that smaller working groups would, hopefully, now be tasked in the New Year to get on with practical business and report back periodically. He also spoke about the triple lock, NI not being a large society, nor did he think politicians were completely out of touch. He mentioned as well the establishment of the 32 County Group because some Republicans feared a sell-out by Sinn Fein. He also said neither the Dublin Government or SDLP were in the business of coercion. Douglas got the last word in, stating again that he felt a bottom-up approach of some sort was needed to engage those who are making genuine efforts to keep the community together.

Audience questions

15. With time, as always, running out questions from the floor continued in the same vein as the panel's questions and referred to the lack of partners between unionists and nationalists; the need for a joint political and peace process; and the

SDLP and Sinn Fein being 'natural partners'. In reply, Sean said that establishing political institutions rendered as totally inexcusable (as it always had been) the use of violence; he didn't accept that the SDLP were the natural partners of Sinn Fein and indeed spoke against this being so at some length (Comment: perhaps more, and more personalised, than he ought to have done), and in so doing brought the formal part of the evening to a close.

Comment

16. Sean Farren is a skilful and impressive presenter of the well rehearsed views of the SDLP and nationalist aspirations generally and, without Alex Attwood on this occasion to provide the hard edges, his 'friendly face' message was well received by the (small) ECONI audience. I have to say though that I came away more with the words of Sammy Douglas expressing unionist anxieties ringing in my ears (I agreed with him at the close that PAB would shortly be in touch to further listen to the concerns that he voiced).

17. I should flag up that ECONI's request for a Ministerial attendance (towards May) at this series will shortly be submitted (on receipt of which advice will be offered) but in the meantime it will be the turn of Alliance at the January meeting.

(Signed)

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PRESS RELEASE

5 pages

SENIOR SDLP NEGOTIATOR OUTLINES NEGOTIATING POSITION TO ECONI MEETING IN BELFAST

Embargo: 7.00pm 11th December, 1997

SDLP senior negotiator, Sean Farren, will outline the principles underpinning the party's negotiating position at the all party talks when he addresses a meeting organised by ECONI in Belfast tonight. The meeting takes place at 7.30 at Belfast YMCA.

The following is the text of his speech.

The SDLP see these negotiations as the product of a long and difficult process of rethinking and reworking the political basis to the relationships between the peoples of Ireland and Britain. That process has found expression in the New Ireland Forum, in the Anglo-Irish agreement, in the Downing Street Declaration and in the deliberations of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. Out of all of these deliberations and developments have come important elements of the means and of the ends to the settlement which our negotiations will, hopefully, reach.

Central to all of these initiatives has been the 'totality of relationships' between the peoples of these island, a phrase first formally endorsed at the Dublin Summit of 1980 between Margaret Thatcher and Charles Haughey. The agenda for the negotiations is based on the need to reconcile the people bound up in those relationships. The outcomes sought are a set of agreed political institutions to give expression to those relationships as well as a resolution to a range of issues which include the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, the treatment of prisoners, returning the bodies of the 'disappeared'.

Agreeing political institutions to accommodate and reconcile our people divided by the two apparently exclusive sets of political aspirations represented by the unionist and nationalist traditions is an immense challenge.

In essence, our conflict is the last negative legacy of the ancient quarrel between the peoples of Ireland and Britain. In recognition of this fact, it is now firmly established that the ultimate resolution of that conflict can only come about within the context and framework of the wider and evolving British-Irish process, and that it cannot be resolved in an exclusively Northern Irish context.

The SDLP believes that in its contemporary manifestation the Northern Ireland problem is in essence a conflict between two identities - or, more precisely, the failure to devise political structures which will accommodate the differences between them and allow full and mutual expression of those two identities.

The nationalist community in Northern Ireland sees its identity as essentially Irish and part of the wider Irish family on the island of Ireland. From the inception of Northern Ireland until the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the nationalist identity was denied proper political expression and

John Hume MP MEP Party Leader

Seamus Mallon MP Deputy Leader

Eddie McGrady MP Chief Whip



The SDLP has deliberately chosen the European model as the most appropriate one for a North-South body. Not only is it a model which has served to reconcile a continent once riven by conflict, it is also one which develops at the pace determined by its all members and in accordance with the needs of those it serves.

There is a considerable volume of practical activity about which to consult, and propose common and complementary action. Across the whole spectrum of social, cultural and economic activity much can be achieved through a new North-South partnership. Recommendations to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation from organisations North and South have pointed to initiatives to improve infrastructure, to harmonise health and educational services, to promote trade at home and abroad, to develop agriculture and tourism among many others. Their recommendations provide a ready-made agenda to fully occupy a North-South body for many years ahead.

Considerable progress has already been achieved with respect to Irish-British relationships over recent years, notably since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed in 1985. Consultative mechanisms are now in place to address issues of concern to either side. Nonetheless, the need to strengthen co-operation and understanding on a wide range of political, social and economic issues between the people of our two islands, is an on-going process and one which will demand detailed attention in the course of the present negotiations.

In addressing all of these relationships, the SDLP will require that existing constitutional and political structures affecting these relationships be thoroughly reviewed with the objective of agreeing new constitutional and structural arrangements to express those relationships in a manner acceptable to all sides.

Human Rights: legal, security and policing issues.

The Northern Ireland problem has had the most profound implications for the whole issue of human rights, particularly in the legal, security and policing areas. While progress has been made in recent years to address these problems, the basic analysis remains valid and will do so as long as the key issue of political consensus remains unresolved.

In the specific area of human rights itself, negotiations must seek to ensure that strong and effective measures are put in place to protect fundamental rights. In this regard the question of a Bill of Rights must be examined in the course of which internationally accepted principles of human, civil and political rights should be identified and appropriate means for their application agreed.

In this context, policing is of crucial significance. Impartial policing to uphold the law, defend public institutions and protect fundamental rights is essential to the well-being of any society. Such policing will necessarily command support and confidence across all sections of society. In Northern Ireland, the present police service does not command the necessary support and confidence that exists in normal societies. Fundamental changes in policing will be crucial to a settlement that aims to win widespread support and so, must form a key focus of the negotiations.

Equality and Equity

The failure to create a social order based on principles of justice and equity has been central to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The SDLP as a party founded out of the maelstrom of the nineteen sixties civil rights campaign is determined that such principles should provide a bedrock for the settlement which negotiations are aimed at achieving.

By these principles of equality and equity the SDLP means equality of opportunity, civil liberties and social justice for all. By equality of opportunity we mean the right to a good education, to

have a fair opportunity of a job and a reasonable standard of living. While progress has been made in addressing some of the injustices and inequities of the past much remains to be achieved. In employment, notwithstanding the work of the Fair Employment Commission, disparities between our communities persist to the point where the likelihood of a Catholic male being unemployed remains more than twice that for a Protestant male while amongst the employed Catholics remain considerably over-represented amongst the lower paid. Such disparity fuel resentment and suspicion. Means for their elimination must receive a high priority within our negotiations.

By respect for civil liberties we mean the right of all, no matter what their views, to full participation, subject only to the rule of law, in promoting and developing civic society. There must be no second class citizens, no sense that anyone, or any section of society is excluded from such participation because of one's identity, or the identity, aspirations and traditions of one's community.

By social justice we mean the right to a decent standard of living, to protection in employment and to adequate health-care. In this respect the SDLP will be urging that the principles in the Social Chapter of the European Union be endorsed within the context of a settlement.

Cultural Rights

The failure to ensure parity of esteem between our cultural traditions has been a significant contributing factor to our conflict. Over the fifty years of unionist rule, unionist traditions alone received public acknowledgement, esteem and support with the result that the cultural traditions, customs and language of the nationalist community were virtually non-existent in any official and public sense.

With regard to the Irish language in particular, not only was official recognition and support absent but, in addition, official hostility attempted to inhibit and constrain the use and development of the language. Both governments have stressed that '...any new political arrangements must be based on full respect for, and protection and expression of, the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland and even-handedly afford both communities in Northern Ireland parity of esteem and treatment...'

The respect and esteem for the Irish language and culture sought by the SDLP should not be seen as a threat to any individual or to the values and traditions of any community. On the contrary, esteem and respect for the language and culture of one community should be seen as adding to the cultural diversity and richness of all.

Social and Economic Development

The economic and social costs of the violence and instability have been enormous. Over three thousand have been killed, more than thirty thousand injured and property destroyed on a large scale. No one can calculate the cost of the human misery inflicted on the victims of violence and their families. No less victims are those in both communities who have been caught up in all forms of violence, their lives and the lives of their families blighted by imprisonment and injustice.

The monetary cost of the violence has been enormous and economic development seriously inhibited.

One of the tragic legacies of a system of government which, for over 50 years, effectively denied one community equality of social and economic opportunity was the creation of severely marginalised and disadvantaged areas within the nationalist community. Today that deprivation is no longer confined to the nationalist community alone; as a result of the contraction of

Northern Ireland's traditional industrial base a generation from the unionist community has been reduced to a similar status of socio-economic marginalisation. A settlement which does not lay the basis for eliminating the inequities and injustice of a society of 'haves' and 'haves nots' would hardly be a desirable outcome.

The SDLP has continually urged that it be a declared objective of all parties to encourage and facilitate as much progress as possible towards greater equity and prosperity, initially using the available tools and instruments of local economic governance in a dynamic and creative way while a permanent settlement to the conflict is sought by political means.

In the more favourable economic climate which has been emerging in recent years and from which both parts of the island are benefitting, the need to develop a coherent and co-ordinated all-island approach to economic development is becoming more and more apparent. It is the SDLP's view that this approach should be based on a North-South partnership encompassing the whole range of socio-economic and business relationships on the island. The SDLP further believes that the success of the island economy will be entirely complementary to the wider economic success of Ireland and Britain within the European Union. So, planning the approach must take account of this wider context and be undertaken in conjunction with its appropriate agencies.

Confidence Building Measures

Confidence building measures are crucial to creating and developing trust as negotiations progress. Such measures include the decommissioning of weapons, the treatment and release of prisoners, information on missing persons and day to day policing. Progress on such matters will contribute enormously to the trust essential if parties are to advance the political agenda at the same time.

Decommissioning is an important confidence building measure, the approach to which is rooted in the Mitchell Principles of Democracy and Non-Violence and for the implementation of which both governments have issued detailed proposals. In practical terms these will require acceptance of the need to advance decommissioning, as the Mitchell report itself states, "during the process of all-party negotiations, rather than before or after". The SDLP's position on decommissioning fully supports this recommendation together with the joint proposals advanced by the Irish and British governments as to its implementation.

Within the negotiations parties should be able to propose how the modalities and schemes for decommissioning could operate as well as acting jointly to monitor the actual progress of decommissioning. Similarly, proposals for dealing with the other confidence building measures may also be brought forward.

ENDS

11/21/97

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