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Mr. Bullfinch / Mr. Kennedy  
S.H. (last names 10-11)

CC Taoiseach  
Mr. Deakin  
Mr. McGearty

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17  
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PSJ  
PSS  
Mr F. Murray  
Mr T Dalton  
S.H.  
16/1

Meeting with Mr. Reg Empey  
Belfast, 14 January, 1995

1. I had lunch with Reg Empey, the former Lord Mayor of Belfast, in Belfast on 14 January. While mostly identified with the moderate and devolutionist wing of the UUP, Empey has good relations with Molyneaux and with most strands of the party, and is generally a thoughtful and constructive interlocutor in terms of UUP opinion generally.
2. He was very curious about the events surrounding the change of Government here. With particular reference to the former Taoiseach's interview, he was worried that the Fianna Fail party would play a destructive role in Opposition as regards Northern Ireland matters. I assured him the Government would be seeking a consensual approach in terms of our domestic politics, and that the Taoiseach had already put in train meetings with Opposition Leaders on the issue.

Framework Document

3. On the Joint Framework Document, Empey complained bitterly about the lack of information and indeed humbug which prevailed in their contacts with the British Government on this issue. Molyneaux had made himself available for briefing on a Privy Council basis since September, but this offer had not been availed of. Contrary to rumours, Molyneaux had no briefing on the Joint Framework Document, and, Empey admitted, Molyneaux himself was not forthcoming to his party on such information as he had. Commentators were exaggerating the UUP role in Westminster parliamentary arithmetic. They had to be careful about the extent to which they aligned themselves to a "rag-end Government" and made enemies for the future. Unionists assumed Hume, and

even Adams, were familiar with developments. It was difficult for unionists to condition their party members if they had no idea what was forthcoming. There should be no repeat of the mistake of 1985. If the Joint Declaration was met with a categorical refusal by the UUP, matters would not be advanced. He acknowledged fully that the same consideration applied on the nationalist side. The ground should be equally prepared on both sides.

4. I told him there was a commitment to confidentiality between the Governments, and he could be assured that Hume or Adams had no privileged information in this area. We were aiming for a Document which would challenge all sides, and which, inevitably, would have good and bad points for both. The Governments were conscious of the need for optimal management of party opinion on all sides, and that would be addressed by the Tanaiste and Sir Patrick Mayhew at their forthcoming meeting.
5. Empey recalled that at a dinner for him and some unionist colleagues about two years ago, I had strongly advocated the need to revisit the basic issues in Anglo-Irish relations. He himself approved of that, provided it was done sensitively. However he felt the British were not always conscious of the importance of language in these matters, and in that respect were not a match for Irish negotiators.
6. I sketched out for him what I saw as the basic thinking behind the Joint Framework Document. A central objective on our side was to create and maintain stability. It could be in no-one's interest to have a "failed entity" anywhere on the island. To ensure stability, an Irish Government had to consolidate nationalist opinion behind the moderate constitutional option. Great progress had been made on that issue in the peace process, although of course great risks remained. It was then necessary to bring that constituency

to accept, for the first time, the reality and potential legitimacy of the Northern Ireland framework. While the proposed draft would challenge Unionist views in terms of parity of esteem and, possibly, the need for an explicit Irish dimension, it would challenge Republican doctrines much more centrally on the issue of renouncing the claim to jurisdiction, and accepting that part of a new dispensation for Northern Ireland might be acceptance of the legitimacy of the exercise of choice by a majority of its people on constitutional issues. We were justifiably nervous about the effect this might have on the consolidation of the peace process. Nevertheless, these were realities to which the Republican movement would have to face sooner or later. We hoped unionists would understand the need to frame this radical shift in terms which did not alienate the Northern nationalist community. Empey accepted fully that a referendum, if opposed by significant portions of Northern nationalist opinion, would have little chance of success.

#### North-South Structures

7. Empey expressed concern that there might be one North-South body. I said we envisaged flexibility as to structures, but some over-arching body was envisaged. It would not be realistic to expect nationalists to be impressed by a disjointed series of quangos. I said we had taken on board the concerns which a number of his colleagues had articulated to me previously, that the North-South body should not appear an embryonic all-Ireland Government. For that reason we envisaged that functions would come to the body via the Northern Assembly, with generally satisfactory measures for democratic and financial accountability. This was a major softening of the Council of Ireland and Sunningdale models. I urged that unionists should be realistic about the body: It would operate by consensus, and therefore there could be no question about loss of

control. We were meeting their key doctrinal point on the source of power. The body would deal with matters of common interest to both sides. If it still met strong unionist opposition, nationalists could only interpret that as a root and branch resistance of links with the South, and would draw conclusions accordingly.

8. I sketched out broadly other aspects of work in progress, emphasising that crucial aspects were yet to be decided and that unexpected difficulties could arise, e.g. as it had recently in regard to a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Empey said that he was not surprised that a Bill of Rights caused difficulty. It was an area where the UUP had done major work in the last Talks process. They had however come up against British difficulties. He felt this area, and practical economic cooperation in areas of undoubted mutual benefit, were two points of convergence in future talks.
9. Empey quizzed me closely on a statement by the former Taoiseach, in an interview with Mary Holland, that the North-South body would have a legislative function. I reassured him on that point.

#### Economic follow-up to the peace process

10. We had a discussion on economic matters. (Empey is a member of the European Committee of the Regions). He thought it was important for the consolidation of the peace process that there should be an immediate and tangible peace dividend in the deprived areas. The role of women was particularly crucial. For that reason there should be a concentration on areas such as community crèches, etc. He thought that Stormont officials were biased towards "bricks and mortar" projects, such as the Springvale Campus.

11. I said the issues of social inclusiveness and the role of women were generally accepted as priorities in terms of new funding, as had emerged clearly from several conversations with Carlo Trojan of the Commission on the issue. Ms. Julie O'Neill of the Tanaiste's Department had also done quite a lot of work both independently and in relation to the International Fund for Ireland. We hoped, without neglecting in any way the need for social inclusiveness, that the Springvale Campus could also go ahead. The NUU were extremely sensitive to making the project relevant to the communities and envisaged a number of imaginative measures in that respect. Empey said there was an application for a primary school in the area, which would trigger a long planning hearing on whether the area should be zoned for educational or industrial purposes. That meant the Springvale project would in any case take some time. Secondly, if it were zoned for educational purposes, he felt it would rule out industry, and he had not yet despaired of bringing industry into the area.

#### Relations with Hume

12. Reverting to political issues, Empey expressed doubt as to whether Hume really wanted a devolved administration in Northern Ireland. He instanced various approaches which had been made, including to himself, and which Hume had not followed up. I reassured him this was not directed at the UUP. It was well-known that Hume manifested many symptoms of stress, and similar patterns obtained in his relationship with e.g. the Irish Government or American contacts. I suggested the real key to Hume's demeanour was that he was deeply concerned with social order and stability, and had a profound instinctual sense about what his community would or would not accept. I felt his key concern was to find a pragmatic point of balance or equilibrium in the relationships in Ireland. He was ruthless in dismissing

what he felt were untenable approaches, but I felt that if a true balance was struck he would be its most ardent protector and advocate.

Contacts between the Government and UUP

13. I raised with Empey the question of formal UUP contacts with the Government, pointing out that the present configuration might cause less difficulty in their constituency and that it might be a useful second source of information on developments in negotiations with the British. I asked him to sound out Mr. Molyneaux informally and let me know the feeling. I said that as we were now approaching what we hoped would be a more operational stage of negotiations, we would also like to intensify our contacts with them, at official level. He felt personally that this did not raise a difficulty of principle, for the UUP. Molyneaux was generally aware of them (e.g. our present meeting) and did not object.
  
14. I asked him finally whether the hoax bombs at the homes of Ken Maginnis and Councillor Browne in Dungannon might be work of loyalist pranksters, related perhaps to Maginnis' attendance at the Fine Gael meeting in Castlebar. He said Maginnis was firmly convinced that the hoax came from IRA sources. Browne had been a member of the Police Authority. (Maginnis had also got some sense from the Gardai that the attempted abduction of a nurse in Castlebar around the same time might in some way be linked to their presence there).

*Sean O hUiginn*

Sean O hUiginn  
Second Secretary  
Department of Foreign Affairs

16 January, 1995