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Confidential

22 December 1995

Mr Sean O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Second Secretary

Conversation with Bob McCartney MP

I was a guest last night at a private dinner party given by Roy Bradford at his home in North Down.

It was an interesting occasion which brought together a number of Bradford's former Unionist colleagues from the O'Neill era (Stratton Mills, Robin Dickson, Basil McIvor and others) as well as senior members of the judiciary and the Bar and leading Unionist businessmen.

One of the guests was Bob McCartney MP. We had a lengthy and very friendly exchange of views. McCartney began with an apology for his inability to accept my recent invitation to the Secretariat's Christmas party. He hoped that I would understand the reasons why he felt unable to come; he also hoped that "circumstances" would eventually permit a different response.

He spoke first about his impressions of the International Body, whom he met last Saturday evening. In contrast to others here who met the Body and were impressed by them, McCartney was critical on a number of grounds. They did not appear to have worked out their own ground-rules carefully. There was some discussion as to whether they would allow their interlocutors to have sight of their report in draft form. McCartney felt that they should have agreed such points before beginning their round of contacts. He also claimed that Harri

David such
This would be
of interest.
Jhr 3/1/96

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MR. F MURRAY
MR. P TEAHON
MR. S. DONLON
MR. T DALTON

3/1/96

A very useful report. Did Mr O'Donoghue talk to any other guests? I'd like more such meetings to take place.

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mentioned by Mr O h Uiginn
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Holkeri, despite his good command of English, was not up to the nuances of what people were telling the Body. (Such remarks, of course, reflect McCartney's penchant for idiosyncratic criticism - on the last occasion we met, he was equally dismissive of President Clinton).

He had, however, good words for Senator Mitchell. Mitchell is a consummate political negotiator and "this is all about cutting a deal". McCartney expects a fudge to emerge which will focus on a set of principles to which the paramilitaries must subscribe (e.g., an undertaking not to threaten a resumption of violence as a means of influencing political talks). He does not expect the Body to endorse Washington Three.

As for the political track, he sees merit in an elected body of some description as a means of "flushing out" the SDLP and Sinn Fein on their attitude towards internal arrangements in Northern Ireland. He emphasised that, for the pro-Union parties (the description which he favours nowadays - "you can have people who are pro-Union but anti-Unionist"), there is no question of "a return to ascendancy". The UUP and even the DUP absolutely recognise this. He complained, however, that the nationalist parties seem averse even to discussion of internal arrangements - and even if checks and balances on the lines indicated in the Framework for Agreement are potentially available.

McCartney also suggested that elections to an internal body of some type would expose Sinn Fein's less than complete commitment to, and understanding of, democratic processes.

I disputed the claims he was making about the nationalist parties. I told him that they do not object to discussion of such issues, among others, in the political track and I mentioned the emphasis which the Irish Government have been laying on the legitimacy of such discussion.

Asked for his views on the "indexation" approach, McCartney claimed to be agnostic on the precise object for which elections would be held. He can see value, however, in elections designed essentially to refresh mandates and to identify negotiators at three-stranded talks. He observed that, if such elections were to be conducted on a list basis which emphasised parties at the expense of personalities, the smaller Unionist parties would be attracted to this model but the UUP (because of its considerably greater ability to fight constituency-based elections) would not be. Trimble is still very apprehensive of Paisley and will not agree to any model which, he believes, might reinforce the DUP's position.

McCartney's personal preference would be to see an elected body come into existence which would facilitate discussions among the parties but, through a system of sub-committees, would also nominate representatives for separate three-stranded talks. Sub-committee members, in other words, would be mandated to take part in the wider negotiations and to report back to the plenary at regular intervals.

I highlighted the weaknesses of any model for negotiations which would be clearly favour the internal strand. This took us into a general debate on the merits of the approach set out in the Joint Framework Document. McCartney is unhappy with the proposal for North/South structures to facilitate cooperation which, he asserts, will happen regardless and needs no external stimulus. I took issue with this argument. I also explained to him the fundamental calculus behind the Framework Document and, in particular, the implications which flow from a need to meet Unionist concerns on status and consent.

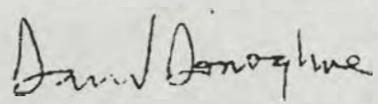
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McCartney made clear that he disagrees fundamentally with the Unionist campaign on Articles Two and Three. These Articles, he suggested, are "all about emotion - and not about the real world". The Nation which is posited exists only "in the heart". One million Unionists do not consider themselves part of the Irish nation - but, as the latter is a purely emotional construct, "what is all the fuss about?". McCartney is far more concerned about North/South structures which would potentially involve very real transfers of power.

In conclusion, he remarked on the "byzantine craftiness" of the Framework Document. He claimed that, even as a lawyer, he could not follow half of it. It was obviously the product of two Governments doing everything in their power to mask differences. He recalled a remark, attributed to "one of Dick Spring's advisers", to the effect that there was no reason why a document reflecting an agreed position should necessarily be readable as well. In McCartney's view, however, the task of reaching overall agreement could be impeded by texts which are impenetrable.

I responded by emphasising the complexity of the linguistic effort required to reflect agreed positions in a manner which protected the profound sensitivities on all sides. I also suggested that, rather than hiding behind disingenuous complaints about the language of the document, McCartney and the Unionists generally should come forward and engage the two Governments in detailed discussion - and, if necessary, clarification - of its contents.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Joint Secretary