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Meeting with P.J. McGrory, 23 November 1985

I met Mr. P.J. McGrory, the prominent Northern Ireland solicitor, in Dundalk on Saturday evening. Among the main points he made were the following.

- He was very surprised at the extent of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He had not expected that it would advance matters as far as it had. He did not think that it had opened the flood gates but a sluice had been opened through which progress could be made. An important benefit of the Agreement was that it had been achieved through non-violent and diplomatic means. This could have important repercussions within the nationalist community. The general mood in the nationalist community and particularly in working class areas would be one of wait and see. They are not prepared to condemn the Agreement. They hope, but are not certain, that it will produce acceptable results.

- For McGrory the main interest is that it has changed relationships within Northern Ireland. He feels it will cause a radical rethink within the community and most particularly among unionists. This may not become evident in the short term and may take as long as ten years but he felt that attitudes could well change as a result of the Agreement and that new institutions and structures could develop.

- He met Desmond Boal, who is a confidant of Paisley, on Friday. Boal stressed to him that the problem for unionists in the past has been that they bend the knee much too frequently to the British. He thought that this Agreement might lead to changed views within the unionist

community which could result in them standing on their own. While the logic of their position might well be an independent Northern Ireland Boal thought that the end result would be a federation, which he himself desires.

McGrory said that the mood within the unionist community, as portrayed by the press is much exaggerated. In fact there has been very little agitation among ordinary unionists in Northern Ireland. The demonstration which took place earlier in the day had been orchestrated by the Orange Order and had more of an air of the 12th July celebrations than it had of a political rally. There is widespread concern within the unionist community about the terms of the Agreement but he has no evidence, from among his many acquaintances in legal circles and from among his many contacts in paramilitary circles, that the present mood is anything more than concern. He sees no hint at present of rebellion. What he does see is a re-examination of the relationship between unionism and the British.

He found it interesting that there were very large numbers of RUC in central Belfast to police the demonstration to the extent that they were withdrawn from nationalist areas where not a policeman was to be seen. The most significant aspect was that the British army was kept away from the area. He thought the purpose of this was to avoid confrontation between the security forces and the demonstrators. Despite what happened in Portadown Loyalists do not wish to attack the police but they may well have wanted to have a go at the British army.

One prominent unionist told him that he did not understand what other unionists were worried about. He didn't see any threat to them in the Agreement. He hoped instead there would be a lot of money which would help to provide jobs for themselves and for their children. That is what unionists really cared about.

He said that Provisional Sinn Fein do not want by-elections and that the election pact offered by them to the SDLP was merely a ploy to enable them to get the SDLP off-side. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the split within the Republican movement between those who want to pursue a policy of participation in the political process and those who want to rely entirely on violent methods continues. Adams fears that if they have to fight elections the whole question will raise its head again to his detriment. The second factor is that in present circumstances they stand to lose votes to the SDLP.

Adams believes that Sinn Fein can never make real political progress until they participate fully in the electoral process in the South. He was, for this reason, bitterly disappointed at the failure of the Ard Fheis to pass the motion which would enable successful Sinn Fein candidates to take their seats in the Dail. McGrory believes that the main reason for the defeat of the motion was opposition by those in the movement who favour a military solution.

He said that the amount of material available to the Provisional IRA is very limited both in terms of guns and explosives. They also have very severe shortages of capable men to carry out their activities.

The fact that three members of the security forces and a civilian caterer were killed by the Provisional IRA within the last week should not be seen as a response by them to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The timing of these killings, which are more numerous than in the recent past, are fortuitous.

McGrory believed that the strategy of the Provisional movement in regard to the Anglo-Irish Agreement is one of wait and see. Adams' response had been relatively moderate and low key.

He thinks that Judge Carswell, who is the judge in the Kirkpatrick trial, may not deliver his judgement until the new year. This worries him a bit because he feels that Kirkpatrick was totally discredited during the course of cross examination and that the judge should in all the circumstances bring in a verdict which would dismiss the accusations made against the defendants on the grounds that Kirkpatrick's evidence is unreliable. There is a possibility that Carswell is sifting through the evidence very carefully and that he may sentence some whilst dismissing the charges against others.

McGrory repeated his accusations, previously reported, about the politicisation of the bench, as evidenced in the judgements of Gibson who acquitted McGlinchey and the Court of Appeal which confirmed Higgins judgement of murder against Private Thain.

Dr.

Daithi O'Ceallaigh

25 November 1985

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