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To:

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From:

Airlie House Conference on Northern Ireland
held in Warrenton, Virginia, U.S.A. from
6-9 January, 1985.

The note of 15 January, 1985 on this Conference listed the main participants. The proceedings were based on nine papers on some of the critical issues relating to Northern Ireland. The organising committee commissioned these papers from academics and journalists and they were distributed in advance of the Conference. The author of the paper under discussion provided a short oral summary and this was followed by a panel discussion and then questions from the floor. A list of the papers is attached and a copy of each one is available if required.

In presenting his discussion paper, Professor Gibson said that British economic policies were not in the best interests of the Northern Ireland economy. He concluded that there was not much hope for that economy until it had power to determine the policies which best suited its needs. This view was opposed by unionist speakers. Sam Wilson, DUP, stressed that Northern Ireland was no different to other regions of the UK which get transfers under the normal policy applying to regions. He saw very little benefit in economic co-operation with the South although at a later stage he did suggest that the electricity interconnector would be a good idea. This suggestion was also supported by Harold McCusker who also referred to the possibility of co-operation in the transport field and in customs clearance procedures at the Border. McCusker was critical of the Dublin Government for the collapse of the Kinsale gas deal. He said that Dublin should have adopted a more flexible approach. The realities of the Kinsale gas

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negotiations were pointed out by Frank Feely, SDLP, i.e. that the British had reneged on the deal. Professor Gibson saw scope for co-operation between North and South in matters such as exchange rates and VAT rates. His view that the violence in Northern Ireland could not be blamed for the economic situation there (which he felt would have happened in any event) was contested on a number of occasions by other participants.

The papers on identity and aspirations brought a hardline speech from Jim Allister, DUP. He stressed their allegiance to Britain and accused the SDLP of running away from the real conference table in Northern Ireland. Robert McCartney, OUP, said that the Republic was committed to a theocratic system and until this changed unionists were not interested in a new relationship with Dublin. In dealing with the Forum Report, the Minister for Justice, said that there was very little appreciation among unionists of how far the Report had gone. The British Government had not taken the Forum's analysis fully on board. In another intervention, McCartney said that the political aspiration of nationalists was not a basic human right. He would see no difficulty about issues such as the making available of land for G.A.A. pitches, but one needed to look for a structure within Northern Ireland, with the insolubles put to one side. This was the thinking in the "Way Forward" document. Seamus Mallon said that the real issues were not being discussed and the British were thereby being let off the hook. Christopher Patten, commented that the British Government could not wait around indefinitely for everybody to agree on changes in the Flags and Emblems legislation etc.

During the panel discussion on Paul Arthur's papers,

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Des O'Malley said that constitutional nationalists should be prepared to state that public morality was clearly divorced from private morality. They should also make it clear that they would be prepared to have a secular constitution. Peter Smith, OUP, said that these issues had been ducked in the Forum Report which had also missed the nature of unionism. The suggestion that the British Government could impose its will on Northern Ireland was rejected by unionists. Peter Robinson said that the reality was that Ulster was part of the United Kingdom. He stressed however that they had to understand and respect others view of history. The Republic was entitled to its interest and concern on behalf of nationalists. Following Peter Smiths invitation to the SDLP to come to the negotiating table with their "shopping list", Austin Currie said these comments were worthy of consideration. There had been a lack of detailed response from the British to the Forum Report - the British had to understand that constitutional nationalists in Northern Ireland were in the front line vis-a-vis the I.R.A. The Parties in the North should see if they could agree on the realities set out in the Forum Report. The list of realities was not inflexible and could be added to or taken from. The challenge was to give effect to the realities once they had been agreed. Harold McCusker commented that the British response to the Forum Report was contained in Prior's statement to the House of Commons last July.

In the session on British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, Mr. Patten said that the strategic issue was not a major one in London's reckoning. He repeated that if there was no progress in Northern Ireland the British would have to exercise their sovereign power, but he did not

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elaborate as to how they would do this. John Hume said that the unionists at the Conference had given a concerted impression that they were waiting at the negotiating table. He asked if they were still opposed to power-sharing and discussion of the Forum Report and wondered if there had indeed been a genuine change of attitude on their part. McCusker responded by saying that the SDLP should call the unionist bluff. His own view was that there could be no return to the 1974 power-sharing arrangement, but some other arrangement for Government should be worked out. The Minister for Justice said that if the British were saying that it was preferable to do nothing, the status quo became a security policy in substitution for a political one. During the exchanges on the question of consent, John Hume said that this was at the heart of the matter. He quoted paragraph 4.15 of the Forum Report which sets out the two sets of legitimate rights that would have to be accommodated. Peter Robinson said there also had to be freedom to withhold consent. The consent clause in the Forum Report, in his view, applied to the structures of a new Ireland only and not to the principle involved. The Report never said that consent is necessary. Robert McCartney said that the matter should have been spelt out in the Forum Report. A mutuality of values was what was needed - in this context, consent was not an issue.

Opening the panel discussion on security matters, Des O'Malley, T.D., was critical of the delay in bringing McGlinchey to trial. What had happened in this case did not inspire any great confidence in the judicial system in Northern Ireland. He pointed to the fact that there had been little criticism

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of our Special Criminal Court in contrast to Diplock Courts. There was a case for having the latter courts made up of three judges. He also expressed doubts about the 'hot pursuit' ideas which had been floated in recent times. All it would mean would be that Northern Security Forces would be lured across the Border as a result of an incident being 'set up' in the North - they would then be ambushed in the South. Brian Mawhinney M.P. took a somewhat negative line in relation to Dublin's security policies saying that it was serving its own interests and one had to ask if there was a lack of political will, as well as a lack of efficiency in our security forces. Dealing with extradition he said that the Republic's unwillingness to move positively in this area was seen as an unwillingness to commit itself politically. He also referred to the absence of meetings between the Chief Constable of the RUC and Commissioner Wren. Seamus Mallon said that the minority 'had taken it in the neck' as a result of security policy on house searches, shoot to kill etc.. Both communities were in an impossible position and it was time to start looking with compassion at issues such as the release of young offenders. The UDR was totally unacceptable to the nationalist community. Oliver Napier said that no act was more likely to get the trust of the Northern majority than a fully committed extradition policy by Dublin (it had earlier been pointed out by Des O'Malley that there were currently 37 warrants with the Irish authorities for execution in relation to just 3 individuals who are wanted in Northern Ireland in connection with terrorist offences).

The debate on Anglo-Irish and North/South relations brought the suggestion from Brian Mawhinney that an Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier should be established which would have the aims of

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- (1) removing ignorance
- (2) monitoring the role of both Governments (like a Select Committee with possibly a role in security); and
- (3) a role in legislation in the two sovereign Parliaments.

Des O'Malley thought that the idea had very limited value and he cautioned the British not to look on it as their total contribution to the Northern Ireland problem for 1985.

The final session of the Conference contained a mixture of optimism and caution. Peter Robinson opened the panel discussion and I have already reported his statements on the need for compromise from both sides and his invitation to the SDLP to commence talks without preconditions. The Minister for Labour said that he had been greatly encouraged by what he had heard during the Conference. The British Government must now set up the negotiating table. Alf Dubs M.P. said that the margin for manoeuvre for each Party was very limited. The SDLP were in the front line and could be undermined by the IRA/Sinn Fein who were not party to the discussions which had taken place over the previous two days. Peter Needham MP said that he appreciated the concern of constitutional nationalists at the lack of response to the Forum Report. Mrs. Thatcher had to improve her learning ability in relation to the North and he advocated parallel discussions among the Parties in the North and between Dublin and London. John Hume said that the Conference had been constructive but the gap was still a wide one. The problem was not with talking but with agreeing what the subject matter would be and its context. The test of the coming months would be the

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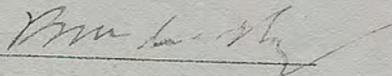
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willingness of all to genuinely reassess their attitudes. The goodwill had to be translated into action. Christopher Patten said that the Conference had successfully explored the limits of the problem. On the consent issue, the definition given by the Irish Government in the Chequers Communique changed the context of the problem for them but it also changed the context for the unionists. The British Government could not be passive - at the end of the day they were the sovereign power. Robert McCartney's synthesis concentrated on two issues - a tactical decision had to be taken about what should be done within the context of the Chequers Communique. This would involve the making of concessions. They must also look at ultimate solutions involving a strategic policy for Ireland based on pluralism. An internal solution was not meant to put off the aspiration for a united Ireland but rather to redefine it in a new context. Seamus Mallon said that the suffering of the people of Northern Ireland had to be stopped and it was the British Government who had the power to achieve this.



B. McCarthy.

21 January, 1985.

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APPENDIX

Airlie House Conference on Northern Ireland

Discussion Papers

1. Economic Realities and Prospects for Economic Co-Operation: Prof. N. Gibson
2. Identity and Aspirations: Unionist Perspectives: A.T. ~~B.~~ Stewart
3. Identity and Aspirations: Nationalist Perspectives: Seamus Deane
4. Further Observation: Liam de Paor
5. Recently Published Documents: P. Arthur
6. British Government Policy in Northern Ireland: Bruce Arnóld
7. The Question of Consent: Bernard Crick
8. Cross Border and Other Security Considerations: K. Boyle/T.Hadden
9. Anglo-Irish Perceptions: J. Bowman