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From: PS/Secretary of State
20 June 1996

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Thomas (L&B) - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Ray - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Ms Checksfield - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office - M
Mr Holmes, No 10 Downing Street - M
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Cran - B
Mr Campbell Bannerman - B

Pnne Minister

JCH

Mood music on last week:

With a quick skim, as

highlighted only.

(over)
21/6

MR BELL - B

+file.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S LUNCH WITH THE IRISH AMBASSADOR

The Secretary of State had an informal lunch with the Irish Ambassador at the Embassy on 20 June 1996. I accompanied the Secretary of State and Colin Wrafter was with the Ambassador.

2. Discussion both before and during lunch ranged over a variety of subjects. On the Talks Process, the Secretary of State gave a frank and entertaining account of the events leading up to the installation of Senator Mitchell as Chairman of the Plenary Session. He observed that despite their initial hostility, the DUP, at least in the shape of Robinson, was clearly showing signs of wanting to be involved in the Talks. Robinson had played a relatively constructive role in the discussions on procedural matters which had occupied the last few days. McCartney had generally been much more difficult, but even he could not resist

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getting involved in the detail of the argument. Interestingly, both McCartney and Robinson had sat through the 4 minute Plenary convened under the Chairmanship of George Mitchell on 19 June despite their stated objections to serving under Mitchell.

3. The Secretary of State spent some time giving his analysis of Trimble's approach and motivations. He said that he was sure that Trimble wanted the process to continue and reach a conclusion, not least because of the fact that he, personally, was enjoying himself hugely. On the other hand he faced enormous political pressures both from the DUP and from elements within his party. He needed to be able to demonstrate that he had secured changes on rules of procedure and the agenda in order to justify the political risk he had taken on Tuesday night. The Secretary of State also stressed the importance of the Irish delegation speaking directly to the unionists rather than using HMG as "Postman Pat".

4. The Ambassador readily acknowledged the Secretary of State's points. He thought that a deal could be struck on the agenda and in particular elevating decommissioning to a higher position within it. He was much more concerned about the fact that a debate on Ground Rules appeared to have opened up, with the risk that they might be undermined. This would be very difficult for the SDLP who were already giving the Irish Government an extremely hard time over what Hume and Mallon saw as an over-willingness on the part of the Irish to make concessions to Trimble.

5. The Secretary of State gave a brief flavour of the theological debate over Ground Rules which had dominated yesterday's proceedings in the Talks, saying that he thought ultimately a deal could be done which did not undermine the status of Ground Rules as the foundation for the existence of the Talks, but which allowed relevant bits of text (unchanged, interjected the Ambassador) into a single Ground Rules document without leaving Trimble in a position of having to sign up lock, stock and barrel to the whole of Ground

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Rules. He agreed with the Ambassador that a deal probably could be struck on the agenda and decommissioning. At all costs, Trimble wanted to avoid a situation where he and his party were into serious negotiations in the three strands whilst decommissioning was only being talked about.

6. The Secretary of State that the three Independent Chairmen had shown the patience of saints in the face of provocation which was, unfortunately, all too typical of Ulster politics. Mitchell had, however, managed to inculcate a generally business-like atmosphere into the long drawn out procedural discussions which had been taking place. The Secretary of State also made the more general point that we should not be too dis-heartened about the slow progress to date. Unlike the talks in 1992, we had achieved a very early success with the signing up to the Mitchell principles. Procedural matters would inevitably take a long time: it had taken some 8-9 weeks to make progress on this in 1992.

7. On Sinn Fein and the possibility of a new ceasefire in the aftermath of the Manchester bombing, the Ambassador recounted his personal gloom and despondency when he had heard about the bombing in the middle of attending a party at 10 Downing Street for the Queen's Birthday Parade when the colour of the Irish guards was being trooped. He acknowledged that Manchester had a large Irish population which made it all the more inexplicable why the IRA should have chosen such a target. He said that the view against Sinn Fein and the IRA was hardening in the republic. He drew the Secretary of State's attention to today's article by Adams in the Irish Times, which was regarded as his answer to the two questions posed by the Irish Government. He said that Adams had equivocated over whether he had asked the IRA for a ceasefire, but saying that Sinn Fein did not advocate the armed struggle had at least provided a partially positive answer to the second Taoiseach question. The Secretary of State said that in his view, the Adams statement about the armed struggle was not nearly sufficient. (Comment: and according to Cefax reports this afternoon, nor is it enough for the

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Taoiseach). He stressed, however, that in the Renewal Debate the previous evening he had not closed the door on a possible entry into political talks by Sinn Fein. But the reality was that in the aftermath of Manchester it would be much harder to convince people that a statement by the IRA could be believed. He very much agreed with the approach of the Taoiseach in putting the onus on Sinn Fein and the IRA to come up with the right words rather than trying to provide them ourselves. The Ambassador accepted this. He also accepted that the approach of asking Sinn Fein the two questions formulated by the Irish Government might have the effect of splitting Sinn Fein away from the IRA. It was not at all clear whether this would be beneficial.

8. Lunch finished with a few remarks about the success of President Robinson's visit to the UK and on BSE.

Comment

9. A frank and informal exchange conducted in a very friendly manner. The Secretary of State did his best to promote Trimble as someone that the Irish could do business with, and do so directly, as part of the Talks process. Barrington seems just about ready to accept this,

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SIGNED

MARTIN HOWARD
PS/Secretary of State (L)

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