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FROM: D J R HILL
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM
18 JUNE 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (L+B) -B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L, B+DFP) -B
PS/Michael Ancram (L, B+DENI) -B
PS/Malcolm Moss (L, DOE+DHSS) -B
PS/Baroness Denton (L, DED+DANI) -B
PS/PUS (L+B) -B
PS/Sir David Fell -B
Mr Thomas (L+B) -B
Mr Bell -B
Mr Legge -B
Mr Leach (L+B) -B
Mr Steele -B
Mr Watkins -B
Mr Wood (L+B) -B
Mr Beeton -B
Mr Currie -B
Mr Hill (L+B) -B
Mr Lavery -B
Mr Maccabe -B
Mr Perry -B
Mr Stephens -B
Ms Checksfield -B
Miss Harrison (L+B) -B
Ms Mapstone -B
Mr Whysall (L+B) -B
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) -B
Mr O'Mahony, TAU -B
Mr Lamont, RID -B
HMA Dublin -B
Mr Westmacott, (via RID) -B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman -B
Mrs McNally (L+B) -B

File Note

TALKS: "CONFERRING" ON PROCEDURAL RULES AND AGENDA - 17 JUNE

Summary

A low intensity round table engagement on the delegations' various proposals regarding the Procedural Rules indicated no major obstacles to agreement on a sensible and practical set of rules. Senator Mitchell's staff were tasked to produce a single composite text as a basis for further discussion. Meanwhile, the meeting will

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resume at 10am on 18 June to consider the delegations' various proposals regarding the remaining agenda for the opening plenary. The Irish seem relaxed on procedural rules and only slightly nervous about the proposed agenda.

Highlights

2. The meeting commenced at 10am, and, with a break for lunch and a short break for tea, ran through until nearly 9pm. Senator Mitchell guided the meeting skillfully and with growing confidence through a discussion and exploration of the delegations' various proposals regarding the procedural rules, guided by the helpful compilation produced by General de Chastelain and his staff over the weekend. The mood was relatively low-key and often good humoured: the meeting and its structure seemed to provide a very useful, non-threatening way of helping delegations to settle down and acclimatise to each other.

3. The UK UP fielded an observer for part of the day. The DUP (Peter Robinson) played an active and constructive role throughout the day, showing due deference to the chair (though calling him "Senator", not "Chairman"): Mr Robinson did, however, take care to justify his position by registering the point that the meeting was not formally part of the negotiations. Rev McCrea was present and seemed cheerful and relaxed, but did not speak.

4. There was some mild initial pressure from the SDLP to assert the primacy and continuing validity of the two Governments' Procedural Guidelines of 6 June, but that soon faded into an exploration of the extent of common ground on individual points. Peter Robinson made a couple of attempts to put the Ground Rules in issue. David Trimble demonstrated his skill at constructive committee work and the UUP team generally showed itself prepared to explain its position and take on board others' comments and criticisms. The Irish (Sean O hUiginn with Dermot Gleeson, the Attorney General present but silent) handled themselves well,

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explaining points in the Procedural Guidelines without aggravating anyone and implicitly conceding their readiness to accept changes in other areas.

5. Without giving a blow-by-blow account, some of the key points included:

(a) Seamus Mallon couched much of his presentation about "sufficient consensus" on the proposition that any deal struck in the Talks would need to be sold to the nationalist community in the teeth of bitter criticism from "those who haven't the courage to come in and argue their case". His mindset at least does not appear to envisage an IRA ceasefire. He certainly asserted firmly that the Talks process, even without Sinn Fein, remained viable and valuable;

(b) Peter Robinson, in a gesture of reassurance, explicitly accepted that any deal would need to win majority support on both sides of the community - but then argued for a simple 75% weighted majority vote to test it (justifying the figure by reference to the one incorporated in the Entry to Negotiations etc Act in respect of the Forum);

(c) the Alliance Party, Labour and the Northern Ireland Womens Coalition confirmed that they were neither Unionist, nor nationalist (thus illustrating the need for at least a "double" test of sufficient consensus - majority support on both sides of the community and overall);

(d) it seemed generally agreed that the frame of reference for any test of "sufficient consensus" was the total valid poll, not just that achieved by those present in the negotiations. The notion that the Chairman should

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the agenda to have some discretion in determining whether it was appropriate to proceed by sufficient consensus if the proposed sub mathematical requirements were met was not seriously the comprehensive challenged;

(signed) (e) there was SDLP and Alliance Party support for the UUP contention at the arrangements for liaison with the parties on Strand 3 issues should be better than last time, but no proposal which went beyond what was in the Procedural Guidelines.

6. Ultimately, following a suggestion from the UUP that attempts should be made to produce a single text for further discussion, Seamus Close (Alliance) proposed that the Chairman's staff be tasked to do this by noon on 18 June. Pending that, it was agreed that the meeting would reconvene at 10am to begin discussion of the delegations' various proposals regarding the agenda for the opening plenary. (Privately the Chairman asked the two Governments to field officials to help his staff produce the necessary text.)

Meeting with Irish Officials

7. After the meeting, Mr Thomas, Mr Leach and I had a brief discussion with Paddy Teahon, Sean O hUiginn, David Donaghue and Stephen Hickey. They seemed pleased with the day's business and were looking ahead to the discussion of the agenda.

8. Mr Trimble and some of his colleagues had had a meeting with Dermot Gleeson, reassuring the Irish that the UUP did not want to push the Loyalists out but stressing the importance they attached to promoting the address to decommissioning to the top of the agenda. In discussion, the Irish side seemed fairly relaxed about adjusting

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the agenda to meet this concern so long as the establishment of the proposed Sub Committee on decommissioning came after the adoption of the comprehensive agenda and the procedural rules.

(signed)

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