

FROM: J A STEPHENS
IPL DIVISION
11 JUNE 1996

POLITICAL AFFAIR
DIVISION
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N.I.O. BELFAST

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Maczabe - B
Mr Lavery - B
Ms Checksfield - B
Ms Mapstone - B

MR HILL - B

POSSIBLE BREAKDOWN STATEMENT

As a contingency measure, I attach a draft of a possible Parliamentary statement tomorrow in the event of a breakdown in negotiations today. It will obviously need adjustment according to the precise point at which any breakdown occurs.

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As a result of that election, and as required by the Act, I invited 9 of the successful Northern Ireland parties to join the negotiations starting on Monday 10 June, along with the British and Irish Governments. Also as required by the Act, Sinn Féin were not invited because the requirement for an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, set out by both the British and Irish Governments, had not been met.

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[The Government wants to see Sinn Féin involved in these negotiations. They would have been, were it not for the breakdown in the IRA ceasefire and their resort to violence which is wholly incompatible with the process of democratic political negotiations. Sinn Féin can still participate - but only once the IRA ceasefire is restored.]

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BREAKDOWN STATEMENT

With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement on the negotiations which began in Northern Ireland on Monday 10 June.

2. It has been the consistent aim of the Government to work to achieve agreement among the parties in Northern Ireland through a process of comprehensive negotiations. Such a process was set out, following consultations with the parties, in Command Paper 3232. The House will recall approving the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act which provided for elections as a gateway to such negotiations.

3. The overwhelming desire of the people of Northern Ireland to see their representatives engage in talks with one another was reflected by the 65% of those eligible who voted in the elections on 30 May.

4. As a result of that election, and as required by the Act, I invited 9 of the successful Northern Ireland parties to join the negotiations starting on Monday 10 June, along with the British and Irish Governments. Also as required by the Act, Sinn Féin were not invited because the requirement for an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, set out by both the British and Irish Governments on 28 February, had not been met.

5. [The Government wants to see Sinn Féin involved in these negotiations. They would have been, were it not for the breakdown in the IRA ceasefire and their resort to violence which is wholly incompatible with the process of democratic political negotiations. Sinn Féin can still participate - but only once the IRA ceasefire is restored.]

6. Achieving agreement in these negotiations, with or without Sinn Féin, was never going to be easy. Many difficult, substantive issues divide the parties. But the Government considers it has a

duty to the people of Northern Ireland to provide every assistance and encouragement to reach agreement.

7. With this in mind, the Government, in agreement with the Irish Government as appropriate, therefore put forward last week a number of procedural proposals intended to enable the negotiations to make progress in addressing substantive issues. These followed consultations with a number of the participating parties, including extensive consultations between the Honourable Gentleman for Portadown and my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister.

Upper Room
8. It has always been clear that there was a role for independent chairmanship in these negotiations. In 1992, all the parties participating in the negotiations then benefited from the independent chairmanship of Sir Ninian Stephen in Strand Two. Towards the end of those negotiations, all parties accepted in practice that Sir Ninian was playing an important role across all the strands.

9. Similarly, while Strand One is for the British Government to chair and Strand Three is for the British and Irish Governments jointly to chair, there remains a need for independent chairmanship in Strand Two and in the plenary format.

10. After consulting a number of parties and considering alternative candidates, the Government, in conjunction with the Irish Government, invited a group consisting of the former members of the International Body, Senator Mitchell, General de Chastelain and Mr Holkeri, to play a role in chairing the various aspects of the negotiations which require independent chairmanship.

11. The International Body was widely respected for its independence and impartiality. Its report has been endorsed by both Governments and most parties participating in the negotiations including the Ulster Unionist Party.

12. Making progress in securing the implementation of all aspects of the report of the International Body was one of the important tasks of the opening plenary. In the view of the Government, Senator Mitchell, as the former chairman of the International Body, is therefore well placed to chair the plenary session. General de Chastelain was invited to provide the independent chairmanship in Strand Two, while Mr Holkeri was invited to act as alternate chairman in any of the independent chairmanship roles.

13. Each is to act impartially and independently. Each is to act as an individual, not as a representative of his own Government, although we are naturally grateful to their respective Governments for their support.

14. But, ultimately, agreement in these and all other matters in the negotiations is a matter for the participants.

15. After my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister, accompanied by the Taoiseach, opened the negotiations on Monday, while some parties were content with the procedural proposals, other parties expressed reservations.

16. After a useful exploration of these concerns during Monday afternoon, the Government yesterday tabled a proposal to enable the negotiations to make progress. Under this proposal, following agreement to the appointment of the independent Chairmen, the various concerns expressed by some parties would have been addressed by a Committee of the Plenary established for this purpose. Until this Committee had reported, the opening plenary would not have progressed beyond opening statements by the various participants.

17. In the meantime, the procedural guidelines proposed by the two Governments would have operated.

18. Regrettably, in the course of further consultations yesterday, it became clear that some parties would not accept this as a way forward. There was no alternative proposal which seemed likely to

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secure any wider consensus. A number of other parties were anxious to make progress towards addressing the substantive issues on the agenda. Accordingly, the Government, which is committed to overcoming obstacles in these negotiations, sought to implement its proposal with the agreement of the other participants. The Ulster Unionist party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist party and the UK Unionist party thereupon walked out of the negotiations.

18. Having proceeded to receive declarations of total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and of non-violence from those participants who remained, the independent Chairman of the plenary, Senator Mitchell, then adjourned the negotiations for the Governments to consider the best way forward.

19. I am grateful to all the independent Chairmen for their forbearance and patience over these two days. I am confident that their independence, impartiality and integrity will be of invaluable benefit if the negotiations are to proceed further.

20. Madam Speaker, the Government continues to believe that these negotiations offer a historic opportunity to secure agreement on how Northern Ireland should be governed within a framework of stable relationships. It is perhaps not surprising, given the deep divisions and history of past recriminations which each participant brings to the negotiating table, that progress should be difficult and even narrow procedural points appear insuperable at first.

21. The Government is convinced, however, that the overwhelming desire of the people of Northern Ireland remains to see their representatives sit down together to address the real problems in the way of agreement. There is no problem that has yet arisen which, with goodwill, cannot be overcome. The Government will be working to enable the parties to find a basis on which they can make progress, with a view to reconvening the negotiations next week, or as early as possible.