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PST: PSS; Ministers Owen,
de Rossa & Taylor; Attorney
General; Minister of State
Coveney; Messrs. Teahon,
Donlon & Dalton; Ambs.
London and Washington; Joint
Secretary; Counsellors A-I.

26 July 1996**No of pages including this one: 3**

To: HQ
For: D. Cooney

From: Belfast
From: B. Nolan

1. I managed to obtain attached summary of SoSNI/Trimble meeting on the understanding that it would remain entirely confidential.
2. In addition to information contained therein, Peter Bell made the following points:
 - Secretary of State and NIO are encouraged by Trimble's efforts to find a way out of the substantive agenda/decommissioning dilemma.
 - They believe that 'talks' between the Irish Government and the UUP would be helpful on this and feel that Trimble himself is of a similar mind.
 - Bell stressed that Trimble's terms are not the terms of the British Government (he resisted my efforts to get him to comment on "Trimble's terms").
 - Secretary of State is to talk to Seamus Mallon over the weekend, possibly tomorrow.

COPY TO:

MR. O'DONNELL
MR. HICKEY
MR. BROSNAN
MR. FAY
MR. BAILEY

MR. CALLAGHAN

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AN AIDE MEMOIRE: SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH MR TRIMBLE,
8.30 AM 25 JULY

1. The mood was better than might have been expected. But it became clear that there had been a genuine misunderstanding of each other's position.
2. Mr Trimble was calm and intent on identifying a constructive way forward, but on his terms.
3. His bottom line which is that there should be something tangible to show by way of progress on the decommissioning issue before the substantive political negotiations start. It is still not clear exactly what that entails: he talked of needing to have a "scheme" in place; but acknowledged that insofar as legislation was one of the steps on the road to the establishment of a scheme, that could not now be in place until late Autumn at the earliest; and that any understanding reached now on a "scheme" would have to be contingent upon the views of Sinn Fein if and when they joined the process.
4. His proposal is that Plenary should next week agree to establish two working groups or sub-committees to take forward
 - the address to decommissioning, and
 - discussion of the comprehensive agenda. (This primarily to give cover for the Loyalists)
5. The working groups/sub-committees should be tasked to report back in early September on the understanding that once their reports were adopted the substantive political negotiations would start.
6. Pressed on whether he could give a commitment to a firm date for the launch of the substantive talks, he said he would need an equal commitment that the Irish Government and SDLP would

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participate constructively and in good faith in the decommissioning working group/sub-committee. He thought the best that could be achieved in both cases was a commitment to firm "targets".

7. Mr Trimble was pressed on what it might be possible to achieve during next week in intensive discussions which might aim to produce a more developed agenda or specification for the "decommissioning strand" of the talks. Mr Trimble was not encouraging.

8. The Secretary of State and Mr Trimble also discussed the option of "parking" the talks after the appointment of the Business Committee. Mr Trimble thought this could be presented positively: the participants would have resolved the purely procedural issues, leaving the decks clear for engagement on the substantive issues in September. He presumed that on this basis the talks would resume with "opening statements": he felt this would be a positive basis for re-opening the process. If two or more days were allowed, perhaps followed by a period of exploratory questioning as in 1992, that could help to settle everyone down, broaden the debate and develop mutual confidence.

9. He said he thought a meeting between the Irish Government and the UUP, perhaps during the Summer break, could be very helpful in establishing whether there was a basis of understanding and mutual confidence between them.

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