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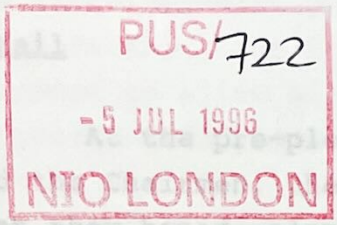
F Talks

From: John McKervill
Talks Secretariat
5 July 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
Mr Lamont, RID -B
HMA Dublin -B
Mr Westmacott, (via RID) -B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman -B
Mrs McNally(L+B) -B

File Note

TALKS: THURSDAY 4 JULY 1996

Summary

Virtually a wasted morning with a one and a half hour debate on whether it would be more productive to move into bilateral rather than plenary format. Debate taken up with counter accusations between the SDLP and the DUP and UKUP on why the SDLP had not been prepared to meet the two parties together the previous day.

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Mitchell invited the delegations to meet individually with him. The afternoon plenary agreed a schedule for the summer. Behind the scenes some hope in dialogue between UUP and SDLP although Irish remain gloomy about talks process.

Detail

2. At the pre-plenary meeting between the two Government teams and the Chairmen, the British team, led by Michael Ancram, reported that they hoped, along with the Irish Government, to let the Chairmen have proposals to deal with the payment of delegations for bilaterals during the summer adjournment. Such bilaterals should be described as informal bilaterals for the preparation of resumed negotiations. It was also noted that the UUP and SDLP had met the previous day and had been engaged in drafting. Seamus Mallon had however reported to the Irish team that no further contact had been made that morning.

3. The plenary conferral meeting began at 1010 with Mitchell inviting delegations to give their views on whether or not to resume bilateral format. This prompted Mallon to say that he believed the meeting should proceed with examination of Rules of Procedure as things had gone as far as they could in bilaterals. McCrea, for the DUP, reported that his party along with the UKUP had held useful meetings with the HMG team, the UUP and the Alliance party. He regretted however that the SDLP had refused to meet his party and the UKUP together. He argued that that meeting could still take place. But if there was not the goodwill on the part of the SDLP to have that meeting, then he feared for the prospects for negotiation of substantive issues. He assured Mallon that what his party had been requesting had been a genuine meeting to clarify issues.

4. Mallon countered that his party had been willing to have a meeting with the DUP but saw no reason why they needed to be accompanied by the UKUP. The claim by McCrea that amendments, diametrically opposed to that of the SDLP, had been put down in the

name of the DUP and UKUP and that it was therefore only logical that there should have been a joint meeting, cut no ice with Mallon. Rather, Mallon claimed that throughout the negotiations there had been a political agenda which needed to be recognised, namely that the three Unionist parties had been putting each other under pressure about the integrity of their pro-Union stance. He was not prepared to allow his party to be used by the DUP and the UKUP in a process possibly designed to isolate the UUP or to block progress.

5. This discussion continued for a further hour, much to the evident frustration of the other delegations, except for the UKUP, who backed up McCrea's claims. Bleakley (Labour), expressed concern about the signal that would go out from the talks if there was no sign of agreement and encouraged the parties to seize the window of opportunity which he believed existed. (He based his claim of a window of opportunity on the reasonably constructive tone of the exchange between McCrea and Mallon!). Trimble later remarked to Michael Ancram that Bleakley had been out of politics for too long!

6. Eventually, after the other delegations had agreed that the issue had been "beaten to death", and with most urging that more progress might be possible in bilateral format, the Chairman agreed to adjourn the meeting at 1135 until 1400 for bilaterals to take place. In that regard, he invited the UUP, SDLP and DUP and UKUP to meet him individually. He hoped thereafter to have meetings with all the other delegations. He further invited those delegations which had not provided comments on the proposed schedule for the summer, which he had circulated the previous day, to do so by 1400.

7. Following their meeting with the Chairman, the UUP reported to the British delegation that Mitchell had encouraged them to carry on with bilateral meetings, particularly with the SDLP. Trimble reported that his party and the SDLP had, the day before, been negotiating language for paras 15 to 17A. Some agreement had been reached but some amendments suggested by either side remained unresolved. Michael Ancram suggested that the best way to proceed might be for the two parties to get together with the British team

to consider language together. Trimble agreed that this might be a useful exercise, although his party would first need to have further talks with Mallon, who had insisted that his discussion with the UUP should remain confidential. Trimble was therefore reluctant to get into a discussion on text with the Minister. Michael Ancram encouraged Trimble to make further contact with Mallon. There then followed a brief discussion about the serious concerns which Trimble had about the Orange parades this weekend and over the twelfth, which Michael Ancram reported orally to the Secretary of State's office.

8. Prior to the resumed conferral session Mitchell reported to the two Governments on his contacts with the parties. He said he believed Trimble was moving in the right direction, with which Michael Ancram agreed, although the Irish put a gloomier gloss on proceedings.

9. The resumed conferral session was devoted to discussion of the schedule. Mitchell, recognising that it was impossible to accommodate everyone, but based on comments he had received from delegations about the schedule which he had circulated the previous day, proposed a number of changes. These were that there would not be a session of the full group in the week beginning 29 July; that delegations should return to full sessions on 3 September; and that facilities would be made available for bilaterals on 29 and 30 July and on each Monday and Tuesday in August. Finally, he said that half the delegations had supported holding a meeting on Monday 8 July while the other half had been opposed. He invited further views from the delegations.

10. The Chairman's efforts to accommodate all the participants received congratulatory remarks from most of the delegations (see para 11). Some changes were however suggested and agreed by the participants. The biggest area of contention was whether to hold a meeting of the talks on the following Monday. The DUP, UKUP and PUP argued strongly against holding a meeting of the talks as a meeting of the Forum had been scheduled for that day and that that had been

agreed by all the parties in the Forum, including the SDLP. When it was reported that a notice of a meeting of the Forum had issued to Forum members, the Chairman concluded that the talks should not be held on Monday 8 July. Mallon however registered his deep concern that a meeting of the Forum had been called without consultation with the talks teams and accused the Secretary of State of having taken a unilateral decision to allow a meeting of the Forum to take place. Sir David Fell was quick to point out that the Secretary of State had no role in deciding whether a meeting of the Forum should take place. Indeed under the Entry to Negotiations Act, his role was the reverse ie that he had only a duty to notify the Forum Chairman when a meeting of the Forum should not take place; not when it could take place. The Irish and SDLP delegations at this stage stressed their belief in the primacy of the negotiations vis a vis the Forum.

11. The following schedule for the next two months was agreed. Meetings of the talks would take place on 9 and 10 July; 16, 17 and 18 July; 22, 23 and 24 July; and 29 July. It was further agreed, to accommodate the UKUP, that if a meeting of the Plenary was deemed necessary it could not take place on 23 or 24 July. Furthermore, if the Plenary was held on 29 July and it was found necessary, then it could continue into 30 July. During August, facilities would be available in Castle Buildings for bilateral meetings to take place on Mondays and Tuesday. At the request of the NIWC, the Chairman undertook to suggest areas for discussion in these bilaterals. Finally, delegations agreed to return in full session on 3 September at a time to be announced at a later date by the Chairman. As for the following week, it was agreed to resume the conferral session at 1300 on Tuesday 9 July to consider Rules of Procedure but that parties would be available for bilaterals during the morning. In the meantime, the Chairman undertook to circulate a revised schedule to the delegations.

(Signed)

JOHN McKERVILL
SH Ext 27088

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