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FROM: JOHN MCKERVILL
20 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 -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: DISCUSSION WITH ALLIANCE PARTY ON 20 JUNE AT 10.10 AM

Michael Ancram held bi-lateral consultations with the Alliance Party, represented by Dr Alderdice, Steven McBride and Sean Neeson, at 10.10 am on 20 June.

2. The meeting began with a discussion on the status of the Ground Rules paper. Michael Ancram explained that he had not been prepared to duck Peter Robinsons' question of yesterday afternoon about Ground Rules' status. In law, by the reference to (Cmnd 3232) in the Act, the Ground Rules defined the nature of the negotiations. If the nature of those negotiations changed fundamentally - eg the omission of one of the three strands - then a legal challenge might be possible on the grounds that the

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negotiations were no longer those referred to in statute. But, while the Ground Rules paper itself could not be amended, it was nevertheless still possible to develop guidelines for the negotiations from the Ground Rules using new language. While he hoped to have Rules of Procedure that reflected the intention of the two Governments in the Ground Rules, a free-standing document incorporating those procedural aspects of the Ground Rules would allow the Irish and SDLP to claim the continuation of the Ground Rules yet at the same time allow the UUP to state that changes had been made to the 6 June Procedural Guidelines. The first step was to get procedures in place in order to give the Chairman the sufficiency of consensus rule in order to discuss the agenda.

3. Alderdice noted that the Unionists were playing legal games. But, at the end of the day, both the UUP and DUP wanted to keep in the process. McCartney, on the other hand, was playing a destructive role. But, the Alliance were more concerned about broader issues. First, they believed someone needed to get a grip on proceedings. For example, delegations were in the dark and had no idea if or when they were required for any particular meeting. Delays and lack of knowledge led people to become fractious which did not help the general atmosphere. In particular there needed to be some order to the timing of meetings. Agreeing that it was less than satisfactory, the Minister noted that when a Business Committee was appointed it would have the responsibility for timing of future meetings. But, at the moment, we were by necessity operating 'ruleless'. Neeson also expressed concern that non-elected delegates were playing more than a minor role. The Minister hoped it would be possible to return to the 3+3 configuration although Alliance argued that even representatives on the Business Committee should be elected members.

4. Alderdice's main concern went much broader however and he argued that the whole strategic approach adopted over the last few years was no longer credible. Attempts to encourage Sinn Fein into democratic politics had so far failed and parties were now more polarised than ever. The Alliance Party had been attending

negotiations since Darlington and, he claimed, the atmosphere at the start of these negotiations had been the worst ever, much because of the gains achieved by the extremist parties in the election at the expense of centre parties including both SDLP and UUP as well as the Alliance. He would welcome an opportunity to talk to the Government about all of this. Michael Ancram agreed that a separate meeting with the Secretary of State would be useful. Both sides agreed to keep in touch.

5. The meeting ended at 10.45 am.

signed.

J McKERVILL

This body so established is not a debating club, a parliament, or a court of law. It is a negotiation body, and its procedures must be appropriate to a negotiating body. They must be such as to facilitate the exploration of differing positions, the development of common ground, and the achievement of agreement. The essential requirements of any procedural guidelines must be that they provide for the fair expression of differing views and that they serve to promote and facilitate the achievement of the widest possible agreement.

We do not propose to submit a detailed set of standing orders. Indeed we doubt that any overly complex procedural rules are necessary. The purpose of any guidelines must be to minimise delay and avoid unnecessary argument on subsidiary issues, rather than to provide a pretext for time wasting and legalistic wrangling. We find it more helpful