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11 JUL 1996

ASSISTANT SEC
CPL

From: S J Leach
APD (L)
10 July 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Bell - B'
Mr Ray - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe o/r
Mr Stephens - B
Ms Checksfield - B
Miss Harrison - B
Mr Whysall - B
Mr McKervill
Mr Lamont, RID FCO - B
HMA Dublin - B

AW 19/7
GA
cc 186
PA B. Lavery
B. Lavery
(L. Lavery)
D. Lavery

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING WITH THE ALLIANCE PARTY

Michael Ancram had a meeting with John Alderdice, Seamus Close and Steve McBride of the Alliance Party at midday on 8 July. Sir David Fell, Mr Thomas and I were also present.

2. Michael Ancram began by making clear that the Chief Constable had made an operational decision about Drumcree which the Government would support. If an accommodation could be worked out between the contending parties through an acceptable channel of mediation then that would, of course, be welcomed.

3. Dr Alderdice, who did most of the talking for Alliance, was unrelievedly pessimistic. Last year's solution at Drumcree had been flawed from the start because the Mediation Network who negotiated it had failed to understand that Unionists could not acknowledge

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compromise and would present it as a victory. Any attempt to accommodate Trimble and the Orange Order this year would be a disaster. The Unionists were simply incapable of recognising compromise solutions. He was therefore disturbed that the Prime Minister had agreed to see the Unionist leaders later on the day: this gave all the wrong signals. Michael Ancram said that in the circumstances the Prime Minister was clearly right not to refuse a request to meet him from the three Unionist party leaders. But there would be no change in the Government's position that the operational judgement of the Chief Constable should be fully supported. Dr Alderdice commented that if the RUC did back down, nationalists would draw the moral that they would never get fair treatment from a six-county police-force. Conversely, if the Unionists eventually lost the stand-off, Trimble would lose a great deal of face in the Unionist community, with serious consequences for the Talks process.

4. The Minister commented that in the light of this rather bleak analysis, he was a little surprised that Dr Alderdice did not seem to favour pro-active attempts at mediation which might allow everyone to save face. The Alliance leader (in a rather convoluted analysis smacking more of psychotherapy than politics) argued that Unionists had to be allowed to fail in order to force them to take responsibility for their own actions. David Trimble was addicted to digging holes for himself and then expecting others to get him out. Much against their own interests, Alliance had gone along with the idea of an election in order to rescue Trimble from an untenable position. Now he had dug another hole at Drumcree, and Paisley and McCartney were anxious to keep him in it.

5. Michael Ancram commented that it was certainly important that the Talks process should not be held to ransom by Unionist attempts to exploit Drumcree. The Unionists had suggested that because they were unable or unwilling to participate in the negotiations until Drumcree was resolved, the process should be suspended. But that would send the signal that the political process could be closed

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down at the whim of a particular party, which would clearly play into the Sinn Fein agenda. Alderdice disagreed: if the Unionists were not prepared to do business, it should be made publicly clear that they were turning the negotiations process into a charade. He was sure that Senator Mitchell would soon tire of a process without substance. Alderdice favoured adjourning the Talks for the Twelfth fortnight, with a clear message that if the Unionists were not prepared to reappear and do constructive business at the end of that period, the process would come to an end.

6. Michael Ancram said that that did not strike him as a productive approach. For one thing, if a time-limit was set, David Trimble would be able to reappear just before it expired and then make a further tactical withdrawal when it suited him. This would give the message that he could switch the talks on and off when he felt like it, which would rapidly discredit the process. And if that happened, we would be left only with the politics of street confrontation.

7. Dr Alderdice said that this might be necessary to bring the Unionists to their senses. It was a well-known maxim amongst practitioners that patients were likely to get into as bad a state once they entered therapy as they had ever been in previously: some suffering would be necessary if the Unionists were going to learn that they had to negotiate a compromise settlement and stick with it. With this final injunction to observe best psychotherapeutic best practice in our dealings with the UUP, Dr Alderdice left (appropriately) for a conference in Vienna.

(Signed)

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