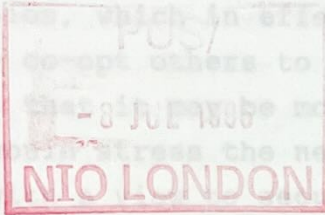


M: QUENTIN THOMAS  
POLITICAL DIRECTOR (L)  
8 July 1996  
QT/MR/68318

Ms CHRISTINE COLLINS

cc PS/PUS(L&B)  
PS/Sir David Fell  
Mr Legge  
Mr Steele  
Mr Bell  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Daniell  
Mr Leach(L&B)  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Perry  
Mr Marsh  
Dr Power  
Mr Hill  
Mr Lavery  
Mr Beeton  
Dr Smyth PAB



**TALKS: POLICING POLICY - PRESSURE POINTS AND ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE**

Many thanks for sending me a copy of your helpful submission and paper on this. I am sure that Ministers will find this very helpful if and when we reach policing issues in the Talks.

2. The policing issue is obviously one of enormous sensitivity not only among the political parties represented in the Talks, but also to the police themselves and the other associated institutions.

3. You may well be right about the kind of outcome you envisage: namely an endorsement of the Government's reform agenda, but with some possible novelty in respect of those issues not yet settled by it. But I am not certain about that. And even if you are there is an important point about our posture in entering discussions of these, as other, subjects. Our broad posture is that there is an open agenda and that HMG will be strongly inclined to endorse any proposal which secures agreement among the parties in Northern Ireland. The distinction between that posture and the one you envisage may be one without a substantial difference, but



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resentationally the distinction is important. (I write this as we have just spent 4 weeks with the parties insisting on writing their own rules of procedure even though, in significant respects, they have in effect endorsed many of the rules drafted for them by the two Governments.)

4. It follows from this that I believe our own objectives might be stated more openly than those in the first paragraph of your submission, which in effect take our reform agenda as a given and seek to co-opt others to it. I will not attempt a re-draft but suggest that it may be more realistic if we envisage objectives which would stress the need for an open discussion of the policing issue with a view to securing agreement and acceptance of whatever policing arrangements emerged.

5. I take it that our principal objective is to secure, at the end of the process, nationalist endorsement, acceptance and support for policing arrangements, as well as unionist support, whether that be on the lines of the schemes that we envisage or otherwise.

6. In a similar vein, I see that you suggest that the key principles set out in the policing structures White Paper are "not intended to be negotiable". Nice try! Our experience so far suggest that the participants in the Talks process regard everything as negotiable, including the time of day. (The main thrust for this has of course come from the unionists and I appreciate the irony that on policing issues they may be instinctively conservative.) We can square the circle to some extent, as we have done on the constitutional issues, by combining an "open agenda/open discussion" approach with a firm reminder of HMG's own approach (or negotiating position) to the issue in question.

7. In paragraph 5 you suggest that dramatic revolutionary challenges are unlikely to be realistic and may well be dangerously



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inter-productive. I do not disagree with that. But I think it is important that Ministers present themselves as being open-minded to change provided that it secures agreement. Paradoxically I believe that this is more likely to lead to acceptance of something closer to the status quo than seeking to remove some issues from debate.

8. This general comment has some implications for the annexes which suggest at various points that issues are too difficult should not be haggled over and so on. The issue whether the RUC is acceptable to all sections of the community - as is boldly asserted - is I think likely to be disputed in the Talks. In general, I think Ministers should be more ready to set out argument for and against (for example, a change of name) and less ready to prejudge the discussion.

9. It will be difficult to secure agreement on the policing issue in the Talks. This will matter less if devolved institutions have no responsibilities in respect of policing. But even on that scenario it is, I would argue, important that as much common ground could be identified in the Talks as possible. This is because, though it will not be easy, I suspect the chances of finding common ground in the Talks process may be greater in this structured process, with relatively independent chairmanship (of HMG), than after any devolved institutions are established. Accordingly I think our objectives should mention the desirability of settling as much of this in the Talks as possible rather than deferring it until later. (This is entirely compatible of course with the objectives as you have stated them.)

File Note

[SIGNED]

QUENTIN THOMAS

PD(L)

OAB 6447

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 - 3 - on why the SDLP had not been prepared to meet the two previous days.

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