

Multi-Party Negotiations - 8 July 1997

Steering Note

The Minister and party are due to arrive in Castle Buildings at 12.30. On arrival, they will be briefed on the outcome of this morning's official level contacts with the British Government and the Chairmen. They will then join the Secretary of State and the Chairmen to discuss the handling of the afternoon Plenary, scheduled to begin at 2pm. A separate meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss developments arising from the Drumcree march has been arranged for after the Plenary.

Scenario for today's Plenary

Discussion with the Chairmen will focus on Senator Mitchell's suggestion that he use this afternoon's meeting to put forward a timetable for the completion of the outstanding business of the Opening Plenary. We have responded favourably to this idea, not least because it will distract attention at today's meeting and hopefully avoid a further unproductive debate on the decommissioning issue.

We have prepared a draft timetable with the British Government which we expect to finalise this morning. According to this, the Plenary will meet on Wednesday of next week to allow the Governments to offer clarification on their proposals. The first two days of the following week will be given over to a debate on the Governments' proposals with a vote being taken on all proposals and amendments on Wednesday 23 July. Assuming that the Governments' proposals are agreed, the remaining business of the Opening Plenary (adoption of the agendas for the three strands, launch of the three strands and the Chairman's concluding statement) would take place in the final week of July.

The British, presumably reacting to prompting from Trimble, have suggested that it might be preferable to leave the vote on the Governments' proposals until the last week in July. We see little point in further delaying the moment of decision, although there is room for some slippage in the proposed timetable, should it prove necessary.

Trimble's position on the Governments' proposals on decommissioning

As of now, there is little cause to believe that Trimble will support the Governments' proposals on decommissioning. He wrote to Tony Blair last week setting out a long list of points on which he requires clarification. We have not received a copy of this letter, although we are aware of its contents (see note on brief). A partial summary of the letter also appeared in the Belfast News Letter.

The Minister will wish to make clear to the British that most of what Trimble is looking for is simply not deliverable in the context of keeping open the prospect of an IRA ceasefire. This is particularly so in respect of his demand that decommissioning start with the

commencement of substantive talks and that it be completed at the same time as the talks. Likewise, any pandering to Trimble's demand that the Governments recognise his right to abort the talks if he is dissatisfied with the pace of decommissioning would be to destroy any remaining possibility of a restoration of the ceasefire.

It is understood that the Political Affairs Minister, Paul Murphy, met Trimble yesterday and apparently found him in "constructive form". The Minister may wish to invite the British side to brief him on this meeting. We understand from British officials that Trimble expressed a readiness to meet the Irish Government to discuss the decommissioning paper. While we should indicate a readiness to meet Trimble, we would have some concern that Trimble is manoeuvring himself into a position where he can emerge from a meeting with the Irish Government blaming us for his failure to move on decommissioning. The Minister might therefore wish to emphasise to the British side the importance of establishing an agreed position on the points raised in Trimble's letter to the Prime Minister before we agree to such a meeting.

Meeting with the Secretary of State on Drumcree

The Minister will wish to send a strong message to the British Government conveying our profound disagreement, not only with the decision to allow the march down the Garvaghy Road, but also with the timing and method of announcement of the decision, the manner of its enforcement and the excuses used to justify it. He will also wish to point to the total absence of any balance in the British Government's respect for the conflicting rights of the Orangemen and the local residents. A full speaking note is included in the brief.

Anglo-Irish Division
8 July 1997