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FROM: J MCKERVILL
18 SEPTEMBER 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Malcolm Moss (DHSS, DOE & L) - B
PS/Baroness Denton (DED, DANI & L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Leach (B&L) - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Priestly - B
Mr Hill (B&L) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Stephens - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B
Mr Dickinson, TAU - B
Mr Lamont, RID FCO - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B
Mr Holmes, No 10

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS, 18 SEPTEMBER: SUMMARY

1. A full record of today's meetings is in preparation. This note provides a summary of the main events of the day.

2. At the plenary meeting at 1000, chaired by George Mitchell, the Alliance Party's submission on breaches of the Mitchell principles and respective rebuttals were considered. Alderdice spoke to his submission and, while he asserted that the fourth principle had been breached, was unable to provide any linkage to the use of or

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threat to use force at Drumcree as trying to "influence the course or the outcome of all-party negotiations." In response Robinson, for the DUP, and Weir, for the UUP, both submitted that there was no case to answer in that no evidence for the Alliance Party's assertions had been produced. Robinson proceeded in a few subsequent questions, to virtually destroy Alderdice's political credibility. No other party made comment. The plenary was adjourned subject to the call of the chair pending the two Governments' determination of the Alliance Party's representations.

3. Just before lunch the Secretary of State had a bilateral with David Trimble, during which the latter displayed a lack of clarity and understanding of the role and purpose of the sub-committee and the Commission on decommissioning. He asserted that the revelation of both Governments Bills had been a helpful exercise but, while recognising that there were always going to be loose ends until/unless Sinn Fein entered the process, he argued that for the three strand negotiations to be launched, general principles on decommissioning would need to be worked out and machinery in place, or ready to be put in place, including perhaps identification of the Commission. He reported that in his discussions with the SDLP, they were close to agreement on generic headings for the agenda for the negotiations. But little further work could be made until the decommissioning and opening plenary agenda had been sorted. Finally he confirmed that he would have no objection to the Secretary of State agreeing to show to the DUP, if they so asked, the British Government's Draft Bill on decommissioning and he confirmed that he had told Paisley that he had been taken through it by British officials.

4. After lunch the SDLP, led by Seamus Mallon, had a meeting with the Secretary of State at which they expressed concerns that the Unionists were seeking to use their discussions on decommissioning to create a log jam. They warned that the Unionists should not take it for granted that the SDLP would remain hanging about for ever while stonewalling debate continued.

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5. There then followed a meeting with the DUP and UKUP who gave out clear signals that they were seeking to destroy the talks process, perhaps fearing that it might succeed. They accepted the Secretary of State's offer of a meeting with officials to go through the British Bill on decommissioning but then proceeded to turn the discussion round claiming that the British Government had resiled from previous commitments on the need for prior decommissioning and affected surprise that the Government had moved away from Washington Three. Despite the Secretary of State's assertions that the Government's position had been clear since January this year, the DUP proceeded later in the day to issue a Press Release strongly critical of the Government and revealing Unionist paranoia at its highest.

6. At 1530 the Irish met the British team to discuss the handling of the trilateral meeting with the UUP which began 25 minutes later than scheduled at 1625. The delay occurred because of DUP attempts to scupper it by telling the UUP that the Government had given up on the need for decommissioning. This required a brief meeting between the UUP and the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram at which Ministers managed to reassure Trimble and his colleagues of the Government's position. The trilateral itself reached little agreement, although there were signs of the Irish trying to be as constructive as possible. Trimble also showed some signs of being prepared to engage while Taylor, much to his leader's annoyance was at his most destructive, causing considerable Irish frustration. It was left that a further trilateral meeting would take place the following Monday afternoon at which, the Tanaiste put down a marker, that he expected progress to be made. The UUP fielded a list of questions which the two Governments undertook to consider while the UUP agreed to reflect on what both Governments had offered in terms of the possible role for the Sub-Committee on decommissioning pending the passage of their respective legislation.

(Signed)

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