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FROM: D J R HILL
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM
18 September 1996



PS/Secretary of State (B&L) cc PS/Michael Ancram (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Legge
Mr Leach (B)
Mr Steele
Mr Watkins
Mr Bell
Mr Wood (B&L)
Mr Stephens
Mr Maccabe
Mr Lavery *Mr. B/G.*
Mr Perry
Mr Priestly
Mr Whysall (B&L)
Ms Mapstone
Ms Bharucha
Mr Campbell Bannerman
Mr Lamont, RID
HMA, Dublin
Mr Clarke, Dublin
Ms Collins, Cabinet Office

TALKS, 18 SEPTEMBER - HANDLING PLAN

Objectives

- Hear views on the Alliance Party's representations and reach a preliminary agreement with the Irish on how to respond.
- Prepare the ground for a successful trilateral between the two Governments and the UUP (4pm).

Alliance Party representations

The two Governments should not seek to intervene in the debate but may need to respond to unionist allegations that the original RUC decision at Drumcree reflected the Governments' secret political agenda (SPOB has provided speaking notes).

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The Chairmen (calling at 9.30am) have the line to take on the sub judice point and will want to explain their proposals for scheduling the debate. (For reasons set out below I suggest we seek a substantial lunch break.) The two Governments' determination of the Alliance representation against the Loyalists may be challenged and we should consider how to respond: the Chairmen might be advised to discourage comment on the representation against the Loyalists, but without ruling it out, leaving the two Governments to reaffirm their position in any determination if necessary.

Mr Whysall's submission of 17 September suggests a possible approach by the two Governments which would avoid the potential difficulty of having to reach agreement with the Irish on whether the UUP and DUP had or had not demonstrably dishonoured the Mitchell principles. Deploying this before the debate could generate a row: it may be accepted more readily once the Alliance Party and others have got things off their chest. Whether we decide to follow this or any other approach, the two Governments will need to have at least a preliminary discussion of their response to the representation, once the plenary discussion is over.

Trilateral relationship

The UUP may seek a further meeting with our "technical" experts and may try to fit in a meeting with the SDLP.

We will need to have a fairly substantial discussion with the Irish about our joint approach to the trilateral. The main issues are

- Substance. Our starting bid might be to maximise the appeal of the two Governments' current proposals, perhaps by bringing out the potential attractions of the decommissioning subcommittee (Mr Leach is preparing a note on this). We might also test out with the Irish the possibility of building up the notion of establishing the independent commission in embryo, possibly non-statutory, form at a relatively early stage.

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- Exit Strategy. The points in my briefing note of 16 September remain valid, but we may not get to the point where it becomes realistic to address them. A further trilateral early next week may be indicated. Meanwhile the Irish have circulated a possible revision of the "Joint Proposal" which might emerge from the two Governments as a means of expressing in plenary any understandings reached with the UUP. An annotated version is being circulated separately. My preliminary view is that we are unlikely to be able to reach agreement on a version which could be put to the UUP at this afternoon's trilateral, and that we should aim to produce an agreed draft in the light of that meeting for deployment next week.

Depending on how the preparatory meeting with the Irish goes, there may be case for a quick Ministerial session with the UUP to roll the pitch in advance of the trilateral.

Handling

We will face conflicting pressures throughout the day and may need to divide our forces.

The Secretary of State and part of the team (Mr Lavery and Mr Whysall?) might focus on the plenary discussion of the Alliance Party representation, and subsequent handling with the Irish.

Mr Leach and I, and Mr Perry as necessary, might field any further request for a meeting with the UUP and prepare for a pre-trilateral meeting with the Irish (which we might provisionally set up for immediately after lunch).

(Signed)

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