

CPL1/25569

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cc FA/APS
Press

From: Ted Hallett
15 January 1997

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 Steele - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Hill (B&L) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Priestly - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B
Mr Sanderson, Cab Off (via IPL) - B
Mr Dickinson, TAU - B
Mr Lamont, RID FCO - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Jones, HO (via IPL) - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B
Mr Holmes, No 10

File
multi

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: 15 JANUARY 1997: SUMMARY

Today's business consisted of meetings at official level with the Alliance Party, the SDLP, the Irish Government, the Women's Coalition and the Independent Chairmen and a telephone conversation with the UUP.

Useful progress was made with the Alliance Party and the SDLP in clarifying the prospects for agreement on the outstanding issues in the SDLP/UUP/Alliance paper of 11 December. Both parties indicated that if it were a question of agreement on the paper alone, this could be achieved without undue difficulty, but the wider issues

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would need to be resolved. In particular, the UUP were not prepared to separate the paper from the terms of entry for Sinn Fein, including a prior tranche of weapons. Mr Hill reviewed the options for overcoming the handling of confidence-building measures in the text. These included dropping either or both of the passages in square brackets, some semantic re-wording to indicate that confidence-building measures would be handled differently from decommissioning, or a separate sub-committee to handle confidence-building measures. Both parties indicated flexibility on these points. The separate sub-committee idea was discussed in some detail. The SDLP were not enthusiastic and made clear that they favoured a holistic approach, but did not rule it out in the context of an overall resolution of the decommissioning issue. They could agree to delete both passages in square brackets if the UUP could collude in the resulting ambiguity about the remit of the sub-committee, but this seemed unlikely.

A review of the situation with Irish officials (Donoghue and Cooney) revealed little new thinking on their side. They expressed willingness to explore ways of making progress with the tripartite text and did not rule out any of the above suggestions, while sharing the SDLP's lack of enthusiasm for a separate sub-committee. Mr Hill outlined the possibility of a wider package of measures designed to resolve the decommissioning issue, move to the three strands and provide the UUP with political cover for moving away from insistence on a prior tranche. Mr Donoghue was prepared to explore ideas with us and agreed that we could air ideas with the other parties, but was insistent that any draft paper should be agreed with them as a joint initiative before being brokered with the parties.

The Women's Coalition expressed pessimism about the prospects for progress, given the inflexibility of the unionist parties. They attached overriding importance to keeping the present process in being and urged the Governments to take their responsibilities in finding a way forward, including making clear to the UUP that their pre-conditions for Sinn's entry into the process were inconsistent

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with the Mitchell Report and were not acceptable to most of the other parties.

The British and Irish delegations had a brief review of the state of play with General de Chastelain at the end of the afternoon. General de Chastelain said that the Chairmen had now met all the parties. It was clear that none of the other parties were prepared to launch a Rule 29 procedure against the UDP and PUP but the DUP and UKUP looked to the British Government to address the issue. On the future of the talks process, the Chairmen had not yet identified a likely basis for agreement, but would be prepared to put forward a proposal if this appeared to be the only way of avoiding a breakdown of the process. Mr Hill outlined our ideas for a package which might either be put forward jointly by the two Governments or form the basis for proposals from the Independent Chairmen and said that the British side would aim to prepare a text shortly, initially for consultation with the Irish. He said that while the two Governments would aim to produce an agreed assessment for the Chairmen, this might not be achievable and in those circumstances they might have to give separate assessments on any points of disagreement. General de Chastelain said he would be content with either approach. If the latter, his view was that the Chairmen would fulfil their responsibilities and make the final judgement and put forward the result as being their own proposals, based on the views of the participants.

In a telephone conversation with Mr Weir of the UUP, Mr Hill floated the idea of a separate sub-committee on confidence-building measures. Mr Weir did not express either opposition to or support for this idea, and agreed to reflect and consult colleagues.

Signed

TED HALLETT

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