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cc: PB
press

From: PETER SMYTH
Political Affairs Division
22 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
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe
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
Miss C Byrne, TPU, HO (via IPL) - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B
Mr Holmes, No 10

file
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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: 22 JANUARY 1997: SUMMARY NOTE

Meetings between the British side and (i) Irish officials, (ii) an Alliance delegation, (iii) a Labour delegation, and (iv) Irish officials plus General de Chastelain failed to elicit any gleams of light about a possible way forward.

The Irish were concerned about the possible content of HMG's proposed package intended to give the UUP sufficient reassurance to allow them to move forward on decommissioning; and were surprised

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that this did not appear to have been discussed in any detail at yesterday's meeting between Trimble and the PM. They noted without comment that the UUP had referred to developing their own ideas for progressing social and economic issues. Concern was registered that efforts to keep the UUP on board should not be interpreted by the Party as encouragement to depart even further from the Mitchell Report.

Alliance were concerned that yesterday's statement by the Secretary of State on Loyalist violence had created an expectation that HMG would take action to expel the UDP and PUP when the Talks resumed on Monday. The delegation also pointed to the dangers of giving the UUP so much "reassurance" that the latter would be allowed to avoid confronting the crucial issue of their ultimate willingness to participate in an inclusive political process (ie one which included Sinn Fein). Trimble's lack of leadership was excoriated, and Alliance had no hesitation in identifying the UUP unwillingness to make progress as the root cause of the current impasse. This paralysis was itself a reflection of the UUP leadership's failure to interpret the mood of the Unionist electorate.

The Labour delegation took an extended conversational perambulation over the same course, with Mr Curran musing at some length on the disparity between the views of grassroots Unionists on the need to make political progress, and the failure of the UUP leadership to take any action which would instil confidence among the other parties as to the UUP's ultimate objectives. Labour itself was firmly of the view that progress on decommissioning should be made via the sub-group and International Body mechanism, without allowing the issue to delay engagement on substantive discussions. Expelling the Loyalist parties was to be avoided if possible. Five of the smaller parties were working to develop a common approach along these lines, with agreement being possible by the end of the week. A bilateral meeting today with the UKUP had ended after five minutes when McCartney stormed out.

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At the final meeting, General de Chastelain provided a readout of the meetings he had had with Labour, the UKUP, the UDP and DUP in the course of the last few days. His feeling was that neither the DUP nor UKUP were anxious to initiate formal proceedings for the expulsion of the Loyalists: the position of the UUP was not known for sure, but it seemed likely that they would take the course apparently favoured by most of the others - ie place responsibility on HMG. With regard to the Chairmen bringing forward their own proposals, it had been pointed out that a failure by the other parties to reach consensus was needed before this provision of the Rules was triggered. This required further investigation. With regard to Monday's proceedings, he had cleared the lines with his colleagues, and felt that a meeting between the Chairmen and the two Governments at 11.00 am would be helpful. At the noon plenary, a tour de table, allowing each party to ventilate whatever issues it felt appropriate, seemed the best mechanism for re-launching proceedings.

[signed PS]

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