

4. Jul. 1997 10:47

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 6865 P. 2/6

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AC**NOTE FOR THE RECORD: MEETING ON 3 JULY 1997**

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Sir Robin Butler

Sir John Chilcot

HMA Dublin

Jonathan Powell

Alistair Campbell

Quentin Thomas

Minister for Foreign Affairs-Mr Burke

Martin Mansergh

Sean O hUiginn

Ambassador Barrington

Wally Kirwan

File  
JL  
4/7.

While the Prime Minister and Taoiseach had a tête-à-tête the rest of the party met in the Cabinet Room.

**Talks**

1. An exchange between the two sides established that their tactical approach to the Talks in the immediate future was a shared one: we would attempt to get the focus of the Plenary on the 8 July on the process of coming to a determination on decommissioning, rather than on the substance of decommissioning, with the aim that the decommissioning subject as a whole would be brought to resolution on or by 28 July.

2. Both sides emphasised the need to keep in touch both on the handling of any clarification of decommissioning with Mr Trimble and with Sinn Féin. On Sinn Féin, the Irish side made clear that they were ready to advise on the best approach to the letter which McGuinness had sent recently. Their assessment was that the letter did not represent prevarication, but rather the need for reassurance on particular issues, in particular on decommissioning. They thought there were signs that the Provisional movement was manoeuvring for a new ceasefire. In many ways the situation was reminiscent of the period in the run up to the August 1994 ceasefire.

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3. The Irish side urged a relatively speedy response to Sinn Féin - perhaps with the reply by the middle of next week. They thought it would be a mistake artificially to delay replying.

Drumcree

4. The Secretary of State gently chided the Irish side for unhelpful public remarks. In response the Irish side emphasised that in their remarks they had always emphasised the Secretary of State's efforts and their support for them. When the Secretary of State invited them to advise her how to proceed they did not rise to the bait. Mr O hUiginn acknowledged that whatever decision was taken there would be trouble either way. Mr Burke chose to emphasise the tantalising nature of the situation: if we could safely navigate the marching season we could be on the verge of really positive political developments.

5. The Secretary of State mentioned how intransigent she had found McKenna, though she realised he did reflect a strand of local opinion. PUS mentioned that the party the residents wished to hold was not banned, but merely the idea of holding it in the middle of the road.

Bloody Sunday etc.

6. The Irish side then ran down a checklist of points they wanted to raise, or to say that they had raised:

- Bloody Sunday: the Secretary of State explained that she hoped to respond before too long.
- Plastic bullets: the Irish side emphasised the sensitivity of their use, particularly after the revelation of some deficiencies in the product. PUS emphasised that the deficiencies were only at the margin. He also stressed that there were not readily available alternatives, partly because of the need to avoid close quarters engagement in a situation where people might be shot or bombed. Mr O hUiginn logged that, judging



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simply from television pictures, there appeared to be an element of trigger-happy behaviour by the RUC last year. The guidelines on the use of plastic bullets were not very obviously being observed.

- Mr Burke raised the issue of expediting compensation for the wrongful conviction of Hill (Birmingham 6). The Secretary of State noted that she would pass on this thought to the Home Secretary.
- IGC: It was agreed that both sides should look for a date before the end of July.

7. At the end of these exchanges the Secretary of State recalled that she had herself moved on a number of issues designed to build confidence: North; prisoner transfers; ECHR; and Bloody Sunday (recalling that she had given lunch to the relatives that day). But she emphasised that she appreciated that there was a wider issue of HMG working to establish its sensitivity on confidence-building measures and its even-handedness. She was very conscious and this was one reason why she had, for example, visited the Residents Associations to show them respect and that she took them seriously.

8. The Irish side readily acknowledged all that she had done.

East/West matters

9. The Secretary of State brought up preparations for the Millennium and wondered about some cross-border element, partly as a way of attracting EU support. The Irish side revealed that their main idea was to establish a conservatoire in Dublin for training on the arts, ballet, music etc. It was noted that there was a possibility of co-operation in respect of computers in schools. There had been some exchanges with the previous Irish Government on this. Mr Kirwan reported that the two Departments of Education had met.



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EU

10. Mr Burke mentioned that the two Governments had a shared view of the Schengen Agreement. The Dutch Presidency had handled the documentation of the recent IGC incompetently. It was a question how much should be done to revisit the issue. Mr Powell said that we intended to pursue it with some vigour in COREPER.

11. Mr Burke mentioned that the Government's awaited proposals from the Commission on enlargement.

12. On Duty Free, Mr Burke made quite a big pitch to secure UK support for maintaining duty free arrangements because of their value in sustaining regional airports.

13. All of these exchanges were conducted informally and with good humour. There was no tension between the two sides.

*(Signed: Quentin Thomas)*

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4 July 1997  
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**CIRCULATION LIST:**

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 Mr Steele  
 Mr Stephens  
 Mr Bell  
 Mr Leach  
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