

Sep 1997 16:43

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No. 3720 P. 2

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✓ PB 9/R
Press

FROM: D J R HILL
CONSTITUTIONAL & POLITICAL DIVISION
11 SEPTEMBER 1997

cc: (see attached)

File Note

MR MURPHY'S VISIT TO DUBLIN, 11 SEPTEMBERSummary

Irish reassured by the account they had received of the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr Trimble, and perhaps over-optimistic that all the loose ends could be tied up before Monday's plenary. Clear signal that they would be ready to defer the launch of the three strands by a day or so, but only if they could be assured, during Monday, that the UUP would agree to come off decommissioning and enter substantive negotiations.

2. Initial joint briefing of Commissioners-designate Nieminen and Johnson went reasonably well and did not expose any serious differences between the two Governments (although the Irish emphasised the difficulties of the Commission's role and the need for "the patience of Job").

Meeting with Mr Burke

3. Mr Murphy, HMA and I met Mr Burke for an hour at 9 am. He was accompanied by Dermot Gallagher, David Cooney and Dermot Brangan.

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4. The Irish side had clearly received a detailed account of the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr Trimble via Paddy Teahon, but were interested to hear the detail which Mr Murphy was able to fill in, including his low key presentation of the various pro-Union confidence building measures (which they saw no difficulty about). The Minister struck a note of "cautious optimism", stressing that the Prime Minister had been firm with the UUP and had received a reasonably clear commitment that the UUP would come off decommissioning and enter substantive negotiations but pointing out that

- the "suggested wording" agreed between the two Governments had not yet been shown to Mr Trimble, although the Prime Minister would talk him through it that day;
- the meeting had not gone into the detail of the procedural points which the UUP would need to sign up to;
- the UUP would enter Castle Buildings but not the conference chamber on 15 September and, for presentational reasons, were unlikely formally to agree to anything on 15 September.

5. The Irish side (Cooney explicitly) accepted that the two Governments could "take a hit" on the timing of the launch of the three strands but only if it was absolutely clear during Monday that we had a firm deal with Trimble that he would join the plenary and sign up to the necessary procedural motion on the Tuesday. They seemed to expect that the two Governments would know by Sunday the terms of the statement Mr Trimble intended to make. Mr Murphy and I cautioned that things might not work out so neatly, that the UUP might have views on the precise terms of any procedural motion which would need to be resolved

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before they committed themselves and that in any event it would not be easy to choreograph

- the deployment of the two Governments' proposed statement on consent and decommissioning;
- any UUP statement of commitment to the talks, and
- the adoption of the necessary procedural motion.

6. Mr Burke envisaged no difficulty in presenting Mr Trimble with the two Governments' proposed statement and a draft of the procedural motion and telling him that he could have both or neither; and was clear that there had to be a firm understanding about this before Monday's plenary (2 pm) even if a formal resolution of the issues had to be deferred until the next day. The Irish bottom line seemed to be that by the end of 15 September the two Governments must either have reached an explicit understanding with Mr Trimble that substantive negotiations would be launched next day, or have launched "Plan B".

7. A further proposal from Mr Burke (not clear if it was pre-meditated) was that if it was necessary to play through Monday on the basis that Mr Trimble would not formally agree to anything until Tuesday, the news of the conditional agreement could be leaked and the Chairmen could start discussions with the parties about procedural arrangements for the commencement of substantive negotiations.

8. On the Chairmanship issue Mr Burke indicated that the Irish would be content with the understanding reached between the Prime Minister and Senator Mitchell, but only if Mr Trimble delivered his side of the deal.

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Mr Murphy explained that he did not yet know whether Mr Trimble was content with the proposal, but believed it met his concerns.

9. Mr Burke also registered the Irish Government's hope that the Prime Minister's proposed Newsletter article would not go so far in response to Unionist concerns that it would inflame "the other side".

10. He mentioned that the Irish Government would be meeting the SDLP leadership at noon. He and Mr Murphy agreed that he would convey a sense of cautious optimism, explain the current proposals for the Chairmanship of strand two and mention the various steps being taken to build Unionist confidence over the next few days.

11. Mr Burke also expressed concern about the pressures on the Loyalist parties and encouraged the British Government to consider all possible ideas for responding, or being seen to respond, to the concerns of Loyalist prisoners.

Meeting with Mr O'Donoghue

12. We then had a brief chat with the Minister for Justice and Tim Dalton before the joint briefing of Commissioners-designate Neiminen and Johnson. The only significant point to emerge was a suggestion from Mr O'Donoghue that the Independent Commission should be "headquartered" in Dublin. The arguments were that this would "create a sense of distance" between the political talks and the decommissioning issue and that Republican paramilitaries would almost certainly want to transact business in the Republic (where most of the illegal weapons were anyway) rather than Northern Ireland. We were cautious in response, pointing to the need for the Commission to liaise with the talks participants, who were mainly Northern Ireland-based.

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13. The joint Ministerial briefing of the Commissioners-designate (which I imagine SPOB will report more fully) went reasonably well although Neiminen and Johnson still looked pretty bemused at the end. The Irish played fair in emphasising the significance of decommissioning and its potential to create confidence among the talks participants, but contrived to leave the impression that the process of securing actual decommissioning was likely to be long and painstaking, requiring considerable reserves of patience.

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MR MURPHY'S VISIT TO DUBLIN, 11 SEPTEMBER

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)
PS/Mr Ingram (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Watkins
Mr Leach
Mr Bell
Mr Stephens
Mr Lavery
Mr Perry
Mr Maccabe
Mr Beeton
Mr Brooker
Mr Priestly
Mr Woods (L&B)
Mr Whysall (L&B)
Ms Mapstone
Ms Bharucha
Mr Fergusson, RID
HMA Dublin
Mr Cary, W'ton via RID
Mr Holmes, No 10
Mr Budd, Cab Office (via IPL)

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