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From: Peter Smyth
Political Affairs Division
29 October 1996

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&L) - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Priestly - B
Mr Hill (B&L) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe
Mr Perry - B
Mr Stephens - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B
Mr Dickinson, TAU - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: 28 OCTOBER 1996

Summary

A Business Committee meeting at 11.00 am was attended by all parties other than Alliance, and in a generally co-operative atmosphere the DUP announced that Paisley's motion calling for the disbandment of the Committee was now formally withdrawn.

CONFIDENTIAL

KM/20477

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2. Despite such a positive development, there was still some debate in the plenary session commencing at 12 noon about how the remainder of the debate on decommissioning was to be programmed. McCartney in particular seemed anxious that all parties should be cross-examined on their positions, but Robinson was among those who felt that opening statements at least ought to be delivered without interruption. More immediately, it was agreed that the Women's Coalition, the SDLP and the UDP should make their opening statements at that day's plenary; with the Irish and Labour Party submissions the following day; and the UUP and HMG on Wednesday. The PUP had no plans to make an initial submission but reserved the right to speak at any time during the debate. Following this tour de table, parties were invited to submit papers to the Chairman's office before Friday, for purposes of informing the debate the following week.

3. The rest of the plenary was taken up with initial submissions. The Womens' Coalition made a wide-ranging and thoughtful contribution, focussing on the fact that Republicans were faced with the dilemma of fighting an unwinnable war, or entering democratic politics. To facilitate the latter development, the barriers to their entry should be made as low as possible, and recognition should be given to the fact that decommissioning was alien to Republican theology. For the SDLP Hume asked Unionists to recognise that decommissioning could never be imposed, but must form part of an overall political settlement. An "unequivocal" end to violence was required; but the present barriers to Sinn Fein should not be raised higher. Once in the political process, the Sinn Fein commitment to peace could be scrutinised and tested. The Mitchell report remained crucial, and insistence on the third Washington test must not be allowed to defeat its implementation. For the UDP McMichael sought to show that Loyalist terrorism was essentially defensive and presented no threat to the democratic process comparable to that of Republicanism; but unilateral decommission was out of the question. Sinn Fein must not be given easy access to Talks - the PM must spell out entry conditions. The contradictory

CONFIDENTIAL

KM/20477

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position of McCartney (lecturing on the need for Unionist unity, but simultaneously working for the expulsion of the Loyalist parties from the Talks) was also alluded to. At 2.00 pm, the plenary adjourned until 10.00 am on Tuesday 29 October.

4. At 3.20, the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram met a joint PUP/UDP delegation. Comments made by the Secretary of State to the media the previous Friday had created considerable difficulties for the Loyalist politicians (a) because they appeared to be a definitive rejection by HMG of the idea that any scope existed to recognise the role of Loyalist prisoners in underpinning the ceasefire; and (b) because references to the Greysteel and Loughinisland massacres as justification for this stance reinforced perceptions that HMG was more interested in promoting an IRA ceasefire than in acknowledging the value of the Loyalist cessation of violence. The Secretary of State explained that, when asked a direct question about whether Loyalists should be "rewarded" for ceasing to carry out violent and illegal actions, he could only give the answer which had been quoted, and pointed to the difficulty of making improvements in the prison system which impacted only on Loyalist prisoners. After a difficult meeting in which even the news of a meeting with the Prime Minister failed to sooth the Loyalist sense of grievance, the Secretary of State undertook to examine once more a "shopping list" of issues, but warned very clearly that nothing would be undertaken which would have the effect of bringing a political element into the criminal justice system.

(Signed)

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