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1. ~~Julie~~ 3/11  
2. Jeff  
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FROM: PETER SMYTH  
4 NOVEMBER 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  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Leach - B  
Mr Bell - 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 - B  
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 FCO - B  
HMA Dublin - B  
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B  
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B  
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B  
Mr Holmes, No 10

5/11

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

**TALKS SUMMARY: 4 NOVEMBER 1996**

Perhaps affected by rumours of another Hume/Adams initiative, and the fears this generated among Unionists that the two Governments were developing an alternative political agenda, business in the early part of the day was characterised by a refusal to agree on how the decommissioning debate should be conducted. Only in the last 2 hours of a long (if interrupted) plenary did the delegations at last close in on the issues, and in a series of thoughtful and focussed exchanges the positions of the two Governments came under close scrutiny.

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Strategic plans for handling the remainder of the decommissioning debate crystallised in a series of meetings held in the morning between HMG, the Independent Chairmen and the Irish delegation. It was accepted that McCartney's attempts to cross-examine the other parties on their initial statements on decommissioning ought not to be allowed to expose any gaps between the positions of the two Governments, or to deprive the Loyalist parties of room for subsequent manoeuvre. It was suggested that the Chairman might wish to draw a distinction between a "clarification" stage of the debate, during which questions could be put to the other parties for them to answer as they felt appropriate; and a "discussion" stage in which the broader principles of decommissioning might be addressed. While recognising that it might be difficult in practice to maintain such a clear distinction, it was agreed that if the Chairman could steer the debate in this fashion, it would provide a helpful precedent for the conduct of future business. Time-limiting the contributions of participants, or trying to screen the questions they might submit, were rejected as likely to prove counter productive.

At a noon meeting with HMG, the Alliance Party had no difficulty with these proposals, and also appeared receptive to the idea that if the possibility of obtaining a credible ceasefire would be enhanced by a re-statement of the Government's position on Sinn Fein entry to Talks (ie offering different wording without any departure from the already stated policy) then there was a responsibility to explore the position.

In the plenary, which met at noon, there was an irksome failure to agree on how the debate should be taken forward, with the UKUP mischievously suggesting that the Business Committee should be summoned in order to give direction to the debate. The SDLP, Alliance and PUP objected to this course of proceeding. Following a one-hour adjournment at 2.00pm, Paisley played in a paper which envisaged a four-stage debate, culminating in a vote being taken on the decommissioning proposals of each party. The relationship of

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this paper to the agenda agreed on 15 October produced a 2-hour debate of great theological subtlety, but one which made no progress towards facilitating a discussion of decommissioning.

During a brief adjournment called at 5.30pm, the Irish side met with Michael Ancram to register strong concerns at the possibility of HMG parting company with them on the centrality of the Mitchell Report. These concerns had been triggered by the previous debate where exchanges on "the principles of decommissioning" had raised the question of what principles, other than those in the Mitchell Report, could legitimately be considered. The Irish feared that the British side, by recognising an essentially open agenda, would encourage the Unionists to sideline Mitchell in favour of their own proposals. Fears were soothed by assurances that the centrality of the Mitchell Report was accepted by HMG, and that it remained highly unlikely that any workable alternatives would emerge.

The final session of plenary began at 6.30pm, with questions to the two Governments. The atmosphere was enhanced by Paisley's withdrawal to meet an evening engagement, and McCartney walking out shortly afterwards when Michael Ancram refused to be intimidated by the learned Counsel's cross-examination skills. A protracted series of questions from Maginnis and Donaldson were fielded by Minister Owen (with Maginnis at one stage almost suggesting that the two Governments had a responsibility to devise a decommissioning scheme in private and impose it on the Talks delegates). The conditions of entry into Talks which would have to be met by Sinn Fein were a predictable theme, and Robinson focussed attention on the scope allowed to the Secretary of State in this regard under the Talks legislation.

The session ended at 8.10pm, to a general feeling that, while it had taken an unconscionable time to get into meaningful engagement, the result did demonstrate that the Talks process could play a useful role when the main players decided to use the machinery properly.

(Signed)

P SMYTH

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