

ST 17/10

cc Mr Thomas

Mr Watkins

Mr Hill

Mr Maccabe

RESTRICTED

Date: 16 October 1996

cc: Minister  
Mr McDonald  
Mr Stephens, NIO(L)  
(personal)

~~Airtel~~

No was the answer,  
+ I have <sup>PS</sup> told PW.

Is there  
anything in X?

JAS

28/10

JAS

17/10

~~1 Tell~~ for info  
R. PA

NORTHERN IRELAND: TALKS

1. The Ambassador may have seen references in yesterday's and today's British press to the "breakthrough" agreement between the UUP and the SDLP on the agenda for the rest of the Plenary session.
2. NIO officials see the UUP/SDLP agreement more as minor progress. It goes no further than agreement on the agenda - I attach a copy of the text. But at least if managed to get the parties beyond procedural items and into a discussion of decommissioning - after just 30 minutes of discussion of other items - when the Plenary opened on Tuesday.
3. Even this modest amount of progress won Trimble the opprobrium of the DUP and the UKUP. Paisley is crying "betrayal". The consensus seems to be that the Lismarn bombings, and the diminishing possibility of Sinn Fein joining the talks at an early stage, gave Trimble enough wiggle room to consign the UUP's earlier paper to the dustbin, and move the talks (a little way) forward. The UUP may also have been concerned at the prospect of the Loyalist cease-fire not holding unless there was some sense of movement.
4. When Martha Pope called for a chat this morning, she said she judged the UUP/SDLP agreement significant, if only because even small steps in the right direction are so difficult to achieve. I asked whether the reference in the agreed agenda to decommissioning "alongside negotiations" meant that Trimble had now formally signed on to parallel decommissioning a la Mitchell. She was clear that it did not. That battle was still to be fought. The main point was that a sense of momentum had been restored; and the Plenary would be taken up with the discussion of decommissioning mechanisms for some time to come.
5. But we should not underestimate Trimble's contribution. It was difficult for Mitchell, or either government, to lavish praise on him; but she wondered whether some of Northern Ireland's business leaders, such as Quigley, Tosh or Reilly might be persuaded to ring Trimble and reassure him of the support of the Protestant business community for what he had done. (Jonathan Stephens in the NIO, to whom I am sending a personal copy of this note, may like to consider.)

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6. Martha said that Tony Lake was trying to fix a meeting with Mitchell before he returned to Belfast next week. She told me (in strict confidence) that one of the ideas Lake wanted to put to Mitchell was that Soderberg/Peters should visit London, Dublin and Belfast after the election in November "to shake a few trees". Mitchell would say that this would not be helpful; and that the only useful visit by US officials at this time would be one with an economic/business focus.

7. Mary Ann Peters (NSC) told me separately today (without mentioning the visit idea) that she was having some difficulty persuading Soderberg that the key issues, such as how to "park" decommissioning without scaring off Sinn Fein forever, were being addressed fully and urgently in London. I assured her that they were, adding that Nancy's point about signalling an entry route to the talks for Sinn Fein was well understood, not least because of the importance of keeping in step with the SDLP and the Irish Government. In case it helped her with Lake/Soderberg, I added that - as John Holmes had said on Friday - it was London's firm intention to go through our strategy carefully with the White House as soon as Ministers had decided how to proceed.

*Peter Westmacott.*

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(2)

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Washington

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FROM Peter Westmacott

TO Mr Stephens NIO(L)

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