

CONFIDENTIAL

FROM: D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
10 OCTOBER 1996

*Mrs McN
(bring with to copy
to you)*

cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Priestly - B
Mr Cornick - B
Mr Whysall (L&B) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Clarke, Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott, W'ton via RID - B
Mr Oakden, No 10
Ms Collins, Cab Office (via IPL) - B

PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B
PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

TALKS: GAMEPLAN FOR WEEK BEGINNING 14 OCTOBER

Objectives

These might be to

- finalise the agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary;
- promote agreement on an "exit strategy" from the decommissioning debate;
- meanwhile commence the substantive "address" to decommissioning, probably by setting out HMG's position in support of the "suggested conclusions" published on 30 September and inviting others to explain and justify their positions.

Plenary agenda

2. The UUP and SDLP negotiating teams have agreed a draft agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary (circulated by Mr Whysall on 9 October). This is acceptable to the two Governments and seems likely to be generally acceptable but is ad referendum to the UUP and SDLP leaderships. We need to

- establish early on Monday whether they have approved it;
- encourage the UUP to confirm that the DUP is on board (or do that ourselves);
- get the agenda adopted by the plenary at noon.

3. Subject to the views of the Irish and the Independent Chairmen it may be best to encourage the UUP and SDLP to circulate their proposed agenda before the plenary commences, to maximise the chances of getting it agreed forthwith. The Political Development Team will provide a brief speaking note expressing HMG's support for the draft agenda.

Comprehensive agenda

4. It is generally agreed that the first item of substantive business should be the "circulation and introduction" of participants' proposals for the comprehensive agenda. HMG's proposals, last circulated on 25 July, have been updated to incorporate a reference to "constitutional issues" in strand one but we will almost certainly be content to accept the comprehensive agenda now agreed between the UUP and SDLP. It would therefore be desirable to avoid having to circulate and speak to our proposals and to leave the UUP and SDLP drafts (which will be identical although they intend to circulate them separately) in command of the field.

CONFIDENTIAL

5. The precise choreography will depend on whether the talks participants are content to proceed immediately to the circulation/introduction of proposals for the comprehensive agenda, or would prefer to defer that until later on Monday, or even Tuesday morning. The earlier the UUP and SDLP drafts are circulated, the better. We can then row in behind them. But if it is agreed that everyone's proposals should be circulated simultaneously we could circulate ours while making clear (including in any introductory remarks) that we are happy to fall in with whatever can be agreed between the parties. For reasons set out below there may be advantage in deferring the "introduction" of participants' proposals until Tuesday.

Exit strategy from the decommissioning debate

6. Mr Stephens is preparing a comprehensive submission on the possible options.

7. It seems increasingly clear that

- for so long as there is a prospect of Sinn Fein joining the negotiations at short notice the UUP will not be able to move away from the positions set out in their paper of 28 September;
- the Irish Government and SDLP will not be able to accept such an outcome, or anything which would be likely permanently to exclude Sinn Fein from the talks process.

8. However, recent events, including in particular the Lisburn bombing, have had the effect of stimulating a broad political consensus that the Republican Movement has effectively excluded itself from the talks process, at least for the time being, opening the possibility that the talks participants could proceed to consider substantive political issues in the three strands without

CONFIDENTIAL

having to seek agreement at this stage on how the decommissioning issue should be handled. [Our broad strategy might then be to make significant substantive progress in the three strands (and recent noises from Dublin are very encouraging in that respect) so that if and when Sinn Fein becomes eligible to join the process and it becomes necessary to return to the decommissioning issue the process as a whole would be more robust and all the existing participants would have an incentive to reach agreement on a way of dealing with it.]

9. We have floated possible options for achieving an agreed "exit strategy" with the Irish and the UUP but we need to

- reach a firm view on the way ahead and the terms which should be set for Sinn Fein's entry to the process. An internal discussion during the course of Monday would be highly desirable;
- reach an understanding on those lines with the Irish. An initial Ministerial-level discussion with the Irish early in the week could be valuable although further work at official level may then be necessary;
- have discussions with at least the UUP, and perhaps the DUP/UKUP, all of whom can be expected to press for a more definitive exclusion of Sinn Fein than the Irish Government/SDLP would be prepared to countenance;
- formulate a proposal and decide how and when to play it into the "address" to decommissioning.

10. This may all take some time. The Secretary of State may also want to clear his lines with the Prime Minister and NI colleagues before finally adopting a new position.

The Decommissioning Debate

11. Meanwhile it seems inevitable that next week will see the start of the "address" to decommissioning.

12. It might appear a little false to hold the debate when everyone is canvassing the possibility of excluding Sinn Fein from the process, but we could reasonably make the point that it would be desirable to explore the possibility of reaching a common position on decommissioning against the chance that it will become a real issue in due course; and there are of course the Loyalists to bear in mind.

13. In any event, the Unionists - especially the DUP and UKUP - will certainly want to get their position on decommissioning firmly on the record and will be irritated by any further delay. (The DUP and UKUP will also want to use the debate to hold the UUP to the approach reflected in their paper of 28 September and to press for Sinn Fein's total and permanent exclusion from the process while putting pressure on Mr Trimble to adopt a similar position).

14. More positively, there could be real advantage in giving each side (Unionists and Irish Government/SDLP) an opportunity to explain their thinking on decommissioning. At the moment the Irish are too prone to dismiss the UUP approach as a "tactic" and the Unionists all too ready to interpret the Irish position as reflecting a desire to prevent decommissioning and support Sinn Fein's political objectives: neither is true and a round table debate might lead to greater mutual understanding, even though it is most unlikely to lead to agreement. At a tactical level there could also be advantage in facing everyone with the likely impasse on decommissioning so that they appreciate the need for a mutually acceptable exit strategy, although that may already have been achieved.

15. Against that background, the Government's approach should be to argue in support of the approach reflected in the "suggested conclusions" published on 30 September. We had previously prepared

CONFIDENTIAL

a written statement of our position on decommissioning and Ms Mapstone will be submitting a revised version tomorrow. Ministers might wish to consider tabling this at the start of the debate (an accompanying speaking note will be provided): it contains quite a lot of useful information - on our view of the International Body's proposed modalities, on the Bill and on the various confidence-building measures - as well as setting out our core position on the decommissioning issue. It would give the other talks participants something to chew on and might be published to help promote public understanding of the Government's position. We could expect other participants to set out their positions in some detail too, possibly in writing: those presentations might be subject to questioning by other participants.

16. All this would give us time to take forward work on a possible "exit strategy". To facilitate this we might even, without dragging our feet, encourage a relatively measured approach to the "address" to decommissioning, eg by suggesting that all participants should take time to prepare themselves for the debate so that it might not start until Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday. If, ultimately, the "exit strategy" is not agreed in time we could perhaps suggest that the plenary "address" be adjourned for reflection once everyone has had their say.

17. Colleagues from the security side of the Office will join the Political Development Team in support of Ministers during this debate.

Briefing meeting

18. In the light of discussion with the two Private Offices, I suggest that Monday morning's briefing meeting take place at 10.30 am at Castle Buildings.

(signed)

D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
OAB 210 6591