

Ref: BO.2389

PRIME MINISTER

1168

cc Ms Polley

IN: 11.30am ON THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER

There is only one item: the political process in Northern Ireland (Memorandum by the Northern Ireland Secretary IN(97)3).

2. We expect all members of IN to be present (Chancellor, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Home Secretary, Defence Secretary and Northern Ireland Secretary). The Chief Whip will also attend.

Objective

3. To note progress towards the Government's objective of achieving a settlement by next May.

Background

4. This first meeting of IN will be an occasion for Ministers other than yourself and the Northern Ireland Secretary to discuss the detail of the political process and its possible outcomes. The Secretary of State's Memorandum, which largely reports on the negotiations so far, does not seek any decisions from the Committee. The Annex is useful in signalling the issues which are beginning to emerge as the core elements in any settlement.

5.

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Issues

6. Discussion of the Memorandum might cover the following points:

- Are Ministers content with the present shape of the potential settlement? Are there elements, especially constitutional, which

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even at this stage they find hard to envisage or believe would be non-negotiable?

- How is the Unionist position likely to develop? How confident can we be that the UUP will stay in the talks, and will resist pressures to break off because of Sinn Fein's failure to decommission? What signs are there that the UUP are prepared to engage fully with the Talks? Have their bilaterals with the SDLP led anywhere? Can more be made of contacts with Dublin? How damaging will be a continuing boycott by the DUP and the UKUP if/when a settlement begins to emerge?
- If cracks are beginning to appear in PIRA, what effect will this have on Sinn Fein's position? Can we be confident that the Continuity IRA will remain a marginal threat? Could its activities undermine the credibility of Sinn Fein's participation in the Talks?

Handling

7. You might ask the Northern Ireland Secretary to introduce her paper and to give colleagues a flavour of the atmosphere at the Talks. She might also want to report back on her IGC with Irish Ministers which takes place today. You might then invite comment from the Committee, perhaps starting with the Foreign Secretary who visited Dublin on Monday 3 November.

Other issues

8. As part of her concern about confidence-building measures within the political process, the Northern Ireland Secretary may also raise:

- Bloody Sunday. At official level it is accepted that we should avoid a formal review. The next step will be to send an independent lawyer to speak to the former paratroop soldier who has made allegations about his colleagues' behaviour. In the light of that a decision will be taken whether to refer the papers to the police. Then the way would be open for the Government to make a statement, including an apology. The Foreign Secretary will be concerned to ensure that the Irish Government is given adequate advanced notice of our intentions.
- Roisin McAliskey. McAliskey is awaiting extradition to Germany. She has now been in detention since November 1996, and since early summer has been bailed to the Maudsley psychiatric hospital

suffering from post-natal depression. The Bow Street Magistrate has repeatedly adjourned the extradition proceedings because of her health. A new date is set for 10 November. If a decision to extradite is taken by the court the remaining appeal procedures (Home Secretary, Habeas Corpus, House of Lords) will take at least 6 months to complete. Her case carries great emotional weight in the Republic and is capable of souring the political process.

- Prisoners. Having had assurances from the Irish that the integrity of sentences will be preserved, the Home Secretary has agreed to three IRA prisoners being repatriated. A more difficult decision looms with the ^{Sullivan}~~Baker~~ Street Four, who have also applied for repatriation. Their tariff must be decided by the Home Secretary. The normal decision for such crimes - a whole life tariff - would make it harder for the Irish to stick by their agreement on sentences.

Conclusions

9. Subject to the discussion, you may be able to sum up that the Committee:

- congratulates the Northern Ireland Secretary on having brought to the peace process further than has been achieved since the start of the Troubles; and
- endorses her assessment of the process so far, and the developing outcome of a settlement as set out in her Memorandum.

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MICHAEL PAKENHAM

5. Nov 1997)