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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
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Prime Minister
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11 November 1997

Dear John,

MEETING WITH JOHN HUME, 12 NOVEMBER

The Prime Minister will be meeting John Hume at 3.30 pm on 12 November in his room at the House of Commons. I understand that Seamus Mallon, Eddie McGrady, Mark Durkan and Sean Farren will also be present. Paul Murphy will attend from here.

The main focus of attention will no doubt be the multi-party negotiations, where discussion can be expected to cover both the process of reaching agreement and the substance of any agreed outcome. The SDLP delegation may also wish to draw out the implications of current tensions in the Republican Movement and Seamus Mallon has announced his intention to raise the question of the level of security force activity in nationalist areas such as South Armagh - see separate note attached.

Talks - process

There may be an interesting divergence of view between John Hume and Seamus Mallon. As the Prime Minister will recall from his meeting with the SDLP at Castle Buildings, Seamus Mallon has strong views about the integrity of the talks process and the need to achieve sufficient consensus

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among the participants there. This leads him to be critical of developments which lessen other participants' focus on the negotiations and in that context he has referred to the risk that the UUP may feel they can develop a bilateral negotiation with HMG outside the talks process. He argues that this leads the UUP to hold back from the necessary engagement with the other parties at Castle Buildings, which he sees as the only way in which the necessary mutual compromises can be struck.

Given that background it may not be tactful for the Prime Minister to work through the elements of the Framework Documents, as he did with the UUP on 8 October.

Either way, both Seamus Mallon and John Hume are likely to emphasise the crucial significance of the two week period before the first review plenary on 1-3 December. Having completed their initial run through the agendas in Strands 1 and 2 the participants have agreed to undertake a round of intensive consultations in bilateral format. In the SDLP view these bilaterals should be proactively led by the respective Chairmen (HMG in respect of Strand 1 and Senator Mitchell in respect of Strand 2) or preferably by Senator Mitchell and the two Governments in concert. The UUP have committed themselves to bilaterals with the SDLP in Strand 1 and the Irish Government in Strand 2, without acknowledging any particular role for the Chairmen. These distinctions may not be significant: the important thing for the SDLP is that the UUP should engage and be seen to engage in a purposive and realistic way. Although Sinn Fein have made a major issue out of the fact that the UUP will not meet, talk to or even acknowledge them, the SDLP are unlikely to be too bothered by that; but they may well make the point that evidence of UUP



engagement and real progress in the talks would strengthen the hand of the Republican leadership in dealing with current internal tensions.

Talks - substance

Again, there may be a difference of approach between Seamus Mallon, probably supported by Mark Durkan and Sean Farren, who have attended every session of the negotiations, and John Hume who has not and who may therefore lack their appreciation of the chemistry which is beginning to develop and of the (admittedly few) positive signals which have been exchanged around the table.

Our current assessment of the state of the parties, including the SDLP, remains as set out in the annex to last week's IN paper (copy attached for ease of reference). The Prime Minister might want to explore the SDLP's views on the key issues identified in that paper and form his own judgement on their readiness to accept a package on those lines. Hume will be keen to tie Sinn Fein into any deal and will therefore emphasise the political and psychological significance of achieving an act of Irish national self-determination (on terms consistent with the Downing Street Declaration) and strong all-Ireland institutional arrangements. Mallon seems more prepared to cut a deal with the UUP without worrying too much about Sinn Fein sensitivities, although he too argues that the price for devolved institutions for Northern Ireland within the UK is that any settlement should have "an all-Ireland character".

The interesting questions in relation to the SDLP are:

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- would they be prepared to contemplate arrangements for devolved government in Northern Ireland which are somewhat less elaborate than those proposed in the Framework for Accountable Government, and
- would they have fundamental objections to the development of East/West institutional architecture of the type favoured by the UUP (accepting that within it there would still be a place for strong North/South institutional arrangements)?

I am sending copies of this letter to [John Grant] (FCO), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and to Sir Stephen Wall (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours sincerely,
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R. Lemon'.

RICHARD LEMON
Private Secretary to Paul Murphy MP
Minister of State

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