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FROM: J JOHNSTON
 CONSTITUTIONAL & POLITICAL DIVISION
 9 JANUARY 1998

cc (See attached list)

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

File
131

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH SINN FEIN: 6 JANUARY 1998

Summary

The Secretary of State, Mr Murphy and Mr Ingram accompanied by Mr Maccabe and myself met a delegation from Sinn Fein comprised of Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Gerry Kelly, Richard McAuley, Barbre d Bruin and Siobhan O'Hanlon. A relaxed and friendly meeting with opening banter from Martin McGuinness about Sinn Fein's last meeting in Parliament Buildings which had been followed by the fire which destroyed the debating chamber. Sinn Fein focused on the need to progress the equality agenda, the refusal of the UUP to engage with them, the sectarian murder campaign being waged against the Nationalist community and further movement on prisoners. A recurring theme was the need for the Government to face down the Unionists and lean on David Trimble to meet with Gerry Adams which in their view was the next important development in the talks process.

Detail

The Secretary of State opened explaining the purpose of her current round of meetings with the parties. Yesterday's meetings were productive with the participants showing a willingness to return. The parties had put forward ideas on how to progress and there was general agreement that if the Heads of Agreement had been in place before Christmas then the general situation might have been better. Both the PUP and UDP were having trouble with prisoners in the Maze and there appeared to be political competition between both parties which were having a difficult time internally. Mr Murphy added that the biggest Confidence Building Measure (CBM) for both communities would be to achieve movement in the Talks. The Secretary of State said that her preference for next week was to discuss with the Irish Government the possibility of tabling papers and then clear the way forward with Senator Mitchell.

Mr Adams asked whether the Secretary of State had any sense of the Prime Minister's meeting with David Trimble. The Secretary of State replied that if it had been negative she would have heard and she was seeing the Prime Minister tomorrow. Her main focus was to deal with the problems of what was going on outside the Talks and how to move things forward next week. If the Prime Minister can move David Trimble forward that would be good. The downside would be if it was outside the Talks process. Other parties had been voicing opinions that they were being treated as second class participants. The PUP in particular said they wanted to be treated seriously, that they had got nothing from the process and had looked stupid when the Irish Government

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announced the release of 9 prisoners before Christmas. The Secretary of State said that she had some good news about prisoners Hanratty, Sherry and Rafferty who had been told by the Home Office that they were to be transferred but hadn't been given a date yet but indications were that it would be soon.

Mr Adams' analysis of the situation was that the Unionist veto was being exerted. Historically that had been used in a monolithic way whereas today it was being used pragmatically. The Unionists were resistant to change. The UUP had refused to engage constructively, the DUP and UKUP were outside with a common tactical objective of preventing the Governments' implementing the Framework Documents. There was tension within loyalism with all elements of the CLMC having killed Catholics over the past year and was nothing more than naked sectarian gangsterism. The attack on the Glengannon Hotel could easily have turned into a massacre with young people killed or injured. The Clifton Bar was another attempt at mass murder. He had information that the murder campaign would continue. He then referred to the murder of John Slane claiming that he had written to the Security Minister and to the RUC Chief Constable asking whether the forensics showed that Mr Slane had been murdered by the UVF. The Secretary of State asked Mr Ingram to follow this up.

Mr Adams alleged that the UFF were involved in the Clifton Bar attack and the murder of Gerry Devlin in Glengormley. Sinn Fein would not ask for the loyalists removal from the Talks but it was important to give the Secretary of State an insight of what it was like to be a Catholic. The vacuum that had been created by the UUP was being filled by the Paramilitaries. There was a huge responsibility on the Government to move matters forward and the answer was not to saturate Nationalist areas with British Troops. The Unionists had said last July that they had to take the Government on tactically on the Garvaghy Road and that's what they were doing now. Trying to slow things down. If the Government moves forward on the equality agenda the Unionists will get things slowed down. Unionists needed to come to terms with Sinn Fein. They were attempting to bully Sinn Fein which would only get a positive response from Unionists when their leaders become positive. At present the leadership was engaged in a competition to see who could be the most intransigent. People in the Sinn Fein camp were looking to see if the Government would face down the Unionists.

The Secretary of State replied that she hoped that attitudes had changed and was trying to change the symbolism of Northern Ireland. She was aware of the feelings of fear in both communities from letters and phone calls she received from women who won't let their kids out at night. The deployment of troops on the streets was necessary to reassure people although she understood that that made the movement of weapons and cars more difficult. She was under pressure to tighten up security in the Maze but had resisted because that would have created difficulties. She had widened the terms of reference of the Narey Enquiry to look at the strategic framework within which the prison operates. She couldn't say anything further now but hoped to open up the prisoners issue within the Talks. Her biggest problem was that she had been seen to respond to different groups and people believed that if they kept pushing her then they would get something more. She had to stand up and say no more but that didn't apply to the Government's equality commitments. The Prime Minister was trying to get the Unionists to move forward on a Heads of Agreement. Mr Adams replied that the PUP

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prisoners complaint was contrived. The Secretary of State responded that perhaps it was not contrived but secondary.

Mr McGuinness said that the Unionists failure to reach agreement before Christmas was because they had realised that the Talks would move on to a new phase. The release of the 9 prisoners by the Irish Government was an excuse to delay. The Loyalists had always been killing Catholics. They had been playing the Orange card in trying to bully the Governments into sympathy with the Unionists. He suggested that HMG should have a strategy of building confidence across the community with prisoner releases complemented by what the Taoiseach was doing in the South. David Trimble believed there could be a meaningful process in which he didn't have to talk to Sinn Fein. Mr Trimble needed to recognise that his party must engage with Sinn Fein. The Prime Minister and Secretary of State should tell Trimble to engage as the next important meeting will be between David Trimble and Gerry Adams. The leaders of the Unionist parties were acting as the cheer leaders for the Loyalist death squads and a majority of the Unionist MPs were attacking the process. The Secretary of State replied that she agreed that there is a golden opportunity to make progress in the Talks and she would encourage David Trimble to engage. That might mean that not just the UUP but also others to show their bottom line.

The Secretary of State asked Sinn Fein whether they had any trouble with fast forwarding the Talks. Mr McGuinness replied the problem with fast forwarding was the mentality that that would portray. Sinn Fein did not want the loyalists out of the Talks but if they were part of the murder campaign then they would lose credibility both inside and outside the process. Mr Adams said that some of the elements representing the UDA were involved in drugs trafficking. He then raised the issue of protection for Alex Maskey asking what sort of row would ensue if Maskey or any Sinn Fein activist was killed because protection hadn't been provided. The Secretary of State commented or they had refused the protection offered. Mr Adams replied that the row would be over whether or not information had come from within the security services. He didn't want the Secretary of State to respond to that point now because the meeting was too important to discuss individual cases. South Armagh and West Belfast was coming down with Brits but not the Shankill Road or the Village area.

Mr Kelly said that people perceived the RUC as colluding in recent murders. There were rumours going round the Nationalist community that at the time of the attack on the Cliftonville Bar the RUC had been in the area all day but pulled back before the attack happened. As far as Sinn Fein was concerned all sides had broken the ceasefires including the British Army and the big argument was the degree of pressure the Government was prepared to put on the Unionists. The Secretary of State replied that she had made it clear that she was trying to encourage inclusive dialogue. Mr Adams replied that David Trimble had shot down the comprehensive list of issues and the commitment given by his party colleagues to take Strand Two meetings to London in January. The Government needed to steel itself for more difficulties up the road if the landscape is to change. The Secretary of State replied that she feared that the difficulties ahead would be much worse than what happened last week. At that point the Secretary of State left the meeting to attend the meeting with the UUP.

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Mr McGuinness agreed to consider Mr Murphy's proposal to provide the parties with pagers in order to keep them in touch with Government announcements. Mr Murphy then turned to the mechanics of the talks and asked whether the meetings suggested for next week were the best vehicle to pick up where the Talks had ended. The Loyalists had expressed regrets that the Talks hadn't come to some form of agreement on the list of key issues before Christmas and they had heard similar views from their prisoners. Over the next 24 hours or so he hoped to be in discussion with the Irish Government to develop the mechanisms to move matters forward next week. Mr Adams suggested that Mr McGuinness should keep in touch with Mr Murphy during the week..

Mr Murphy then referred to the UUP's refusal to take Strand Two meetings to London explaining that the UUP believed there was no point in going to London until there was something meaningful to discuss. Assuming that deadlock was removed over the next week or two the Secretary of State's view was that perhaps the talks should go outside Belfast but instead of Lancaster House meet in a country house type of venue where everyone would be in the same building overnight as opposed to using meeting rooms in central London. That sort of location might provide a pressure cooker atmosphere which could perhaps help move things forward. Mr Kelly asked if meetings were definitely going ahead in London. Mr Murphy replied yes hopefully meetings would proceed in London. Mr Adams said it was important that the commitment to go to London and Dublin was honoured. Mr Murphy replied that when the talks resume it would be necessary to gather momentum and increase intensity in order to do deals and that would involve working long hours. Mr McGuinness commented that that would happen naturally when everyone was really engaged in rolling their sleeves up.

Ms d Bruin said the most hopeful thing that she had heard during the discussion was that the Government was committed to moving forward on the equality agenda. She enquired whether there was a structured programme of equality agenda commitments arising from the manifesto. Mr Ingram replied that the manifesto had dealt with a whole raft of issues including EPA and policing for example. Ms d Bruin replied that if the Nationalist community didn't see change then they would believe that the Unionist community had successfully played the orange card. Mr Murphy said that the equality agenda in the manifesto was a separate issue. The crucial business in the talks was to get an agreement. The CBM liaison sub committee needed to be used more meaningfully in future with perhaps Ministerial involvement.

Mr Kelly asked if the Secretary of State was considering prisoner releases. Mr Ingram replied that that was not possible in the present climate. Mr Kelly asked if the case of prisoner Paul Magee, who was imprisoned in England longer than some of the prisoners who were being transferred, could be looked at. He also asked for tariffs to be provided for the Balcombe Street four. Mr Ingram agreed to follow up both requests.

Signed: Jackie Johnston

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SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH SINN FEIN 5 JANUARY 1998:

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Murphy (DFP,B&L)
PS/Mr Ingram (DED,B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Leach
Mr Bell
Mr Watkins
Mr Stephens
Mr Woods (B&L)
Mr Beeton
Mr Brooker
Mr Hill
Mr Ferguson
Mr Maccabe
Mr Fergusson, RID FCO
Mr Holmes, No 10, via CPL

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