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Talks Planning Unit  
Central Secretariat  
6 January 1998

cc: see list attached

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## NOTE FOR THE RECORD

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETINGS WITH THE SDLP, UKUP AND LABOUR PARTY  
ON 5 JANUARY 1998

The Secretary of State, Mr Murphy, Mr Ingram and Mr Maccabe attended each meeting. The Secretary of State began each one by explaining the context within which her meetings with all parties were being held. Participants were being given an opportunity to talk about how they thought the events of last week had affected the process and how they now thought matters could now be progressed.

## SDLP (Mr Hume and Mr Mallon)

Messrs Hume and Mallon were in a positive mood and came to the meeting with the obvious intention of seeking ways of moving the process forward. Mr Hume began by saying that the UUP's direct approach to the Prime Minister over the head of the Secretary of State had been designed to distract attention from the real talks process and that the best way forward remained inclusive and meaningful dialogue. He continued by saying that the Government should now take decisive control and secure from all parties, on a private basis, their proposals on the way forward. From there, it would be possible to identify areas of cross-party agreement which could be fashioned into a paper for further discussion.

Mr Murphy responded by asking Mr Hume when he envisaged this being undertaken. Mr Mallon explained that it would have to be ready for



tabling next Monday (12th) although he argued that it was not, in their opinion, a matter for the talks business committee.

The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy welcomed this proposal but asked if any thought had been given as to what mechanism could be employed to by-pass the 3 stranded process. Mr Mallon responded by saying that there was nothing sacrosanct about this particular format and that the only business of the day involved moving the process on quickly to a discussion where Sinn Fein would acquiesce on some form of internal assembly and the UUP would agree to the establishment of certain north/south institutions with executive powers. He continued by emphasising that it was vital for both Governments to make it clear to Senator Mitchell that it was their belief that the process was beginning to unravel and that they were now prepared to take a central role regardless of the 3 stranded approach. It was imperative, he said, for all parties to be given a concrete way forward.

The Secretary of State wound up this part of the discussion by agreeing to look at how a mechanism for putting this 'areas of agreement' paper in place could be drawn up and cleared with the parties in advance of 12 January. However, this cranking up of the process would involve seeking the agreement of the Irish, Senator Mitchell together with, at the every least, the acquiescence of as many parties as possible.

Mr Hume raised the prisoners issue by making reference to various weekend media reports. The Secretary of State responded by saying that the Government had made it clear that it appreciated that prisoners were a central issue for a number of parties but that given the events of the last 10 days it was not in a position to discuss the matter further at present. Furthermore, it had had to



risk the loss of some public credibility by giving the impression of not re-introducing a higher level of security since the events at the Maze, in order to help safeguard loyalist and Sinn Fein participation in the Talks.

The Secretary of State also confirmed that the Government had extended the remit of the Narey Enquiry into the recent events at the Maze prison. It would now be taking a much wider view by looking at the policy on containment of terrorist prisoners within what is, from the outside, a normal prison regime. If this, as expected, uncovered a dichotomy it would be expressed publicly and acknowledged by Government.

Mr Hume expressed his unhappiness about various media stories which reported that unionists were doing very poorly on concessions when compared to nationalists, drawing particular attention to the recent statement by Archbishop Eames. Mr Mallon continued by saying that there was a fundamental difference between confidence building measures and 'bounty hunting' and it was important to strike a balance between what was a confidence building measure and what was a key issue which had confidence building spin-offs.

UKUP (Mr Bob McCartney, Mr Cedric Wilson and Mr Paddy Roche)

The meeting with the UKUP was predictable if it was nothing else. After initial salutations Mr McCartney fell rapidly into confrontational mode with the clear intention of rubbishing both the process and the Government's policies on Northern Ireland in general at every opportunity. He began by expressing the view that the talks were damned and that they were now creating more division than ever in our society. The process could only work with republican blessing and they (the republicans) would only be prepared to buy into it if they got everything they wanted. Furthermore, he could



see nothing in anything which the Secretary of State had said or written since she signed up to the Kevin McNamara/Jim Marshall paper in 1988 which contradicted the 'positive persuasion' policy which it had proposed.

The Secretary of State responded by refuting this claim entirely and said that Government policy on Northern Ireland was now based on conference resolutions and she would make arrangements to send copies of the appropriate papers to Mr McCartney.

Mr McCartney continued by stating that all of Northern Ireland's current problems were down to the failures of successive British Governments who had been ruling the province directly since 1972. In particular, he thought the management of the Maze prison had been corrupted in favour of keeping the talks process together. The Secretary of State countered this allegation by arguing that it was only possible to run any prison in a democratic country on the basis of consent and that, in the absence of any constructive alternative from the UKUP, would continue to be the case. In response, Mr McCartney demanded strong action to restore order but Mr Ingram replied by spelling out the ramifications of any such response.

Mr Wilson raised the talks process and said that the UKUP had hoped that the Secretary of State was going to tell them that it had not worked and that she wanted their advice on how best to plan a new way forward. Mr McCartney continued by saying that they believed that it had failed and, in response to the Secretary of State's request for an alternative, said that he wanted the Government to scrap a peace process which relied on the goodwill of terrorists, abolish the province's Quangos and begin a process of restoring powers to local government with a dedicated Ombudsman if necessary. Their bottom line was a return to the Government governing Northern



Ireland like any other part of the United Kingdom. Mr McCartney said that he couldn't help referring back to the McNamara/ Marshall paper of 1988 as ultimately he believed the Government was still in the process of harmonising Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with a view to unification.

Mr McCartney referred finally to the Government's gameplan in the event of a breakdown in the Talks. He had a real belief that the process would fail and was keen to know what contingencies were in place in that event. The Secretary of State confirmed that alternatives were in place but that they would not be revealed as they may merely have the effect of hastening the end of the process. However, the Secretary of State reiterated the Prime Minister's warning that any organisations who returned to violence would be dealt with in the strongest terms.

The meeting ended with Mr McCartney warning that unless any settlement had the support of the vast majority it would prove to be a ticket for real violence on an unprecedented scale.

#### LABOUR

The Labour party delegates began the meeting by reiterating their 100% support for the Secretary of State's position which she gratefully acknowledged. They also expressed regret at the way she had been treated by some local politicians over recent weeks and assured her that she had, and would continue to have, their unqualified backing.

The Secretary of State then began the substantive meeting by explaining that the Narey Enquiry had been expanded to take account of wider prison issues. She also explained that there was a broad



mood among the parties for positive momentum in the talks process with many bemoaning the fact that there had been a failure to reach outline Heads of Agreement 3 weeks ago. The new proposal for the submission of an 'Areas of Agreement' paper was outlined and was welcomed by Labour as a potentially positive way forward. The Secretary of State explained that parties would be asked to sign up to it or at the very least give it their acquiescence. Mr Murphy continued by explaining that the time had now come for crunch decisions and this was accepted.

In response to the Secretary of State's question about how the process could be speeded up Labour said that they were satisfied that Sinn Fein wanted to move but were being constrained by other influences. They considered that it was up to the SDLP and UUP to take the lead and that it was time for the process to be 'tightened up'.

The Labour Party were also concerned that Unionists were peddling the story that the talks process was following and promoting a republican agenda. They considered that this was dangerous and totally unfounded. They urged the Secretary of State to try to get this fact out into the public domain.

Mr Casey was disturbed that they had had little contact with the Irish Government over the last 3 months and indicated that they would appreciate some help from HMG in re-opening contacts. He also felt that the whole talks process would benefit greatly from a greater degree of openness on everyone's part and that with proper commitment from all participants agreement could be reached in 8 to 12 weeks. He concluded that it was vital for the public to see genuine movement but cautioned against letting the talks run right up to the May deadline.



Mr Murphy drew the meeting to a close by thanking the Labour delegation for their contribution and indicated that we may be in touch with them before the end of the week about plans for resuming the talks on Monday.

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ON 5 JANUARY 1998

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)  
PS/Mr Murphy (DFP, B&L)  
PS/Mr Ingram (DED, B&L)  
PS/Mr Worthington (DENI, DHSS&L)  
PS/Lord Dubs (DANI, DOE&L)  
PS/PUS (B&L)  
PS/Mr Semple  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Steele  
Mr Shannon  
Mr Leach  
Mr Bell  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Woods (B&L)  
Mr Beeton  
Mr Brooker  
Mr Hill  
Mr Ferguson  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Perry  
Mr Priestly  
Mr Whysall  
Mr Sanderson, Cab Off (via IPL)  
Mr Fergusson, RID FCO (via IPL)  
HMA Dublin (via IPL)  
Mr N Warner  
Mr Holmes, No 10

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