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FROM:

J MAPSTONE

IPL

18 November 1996

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POLITICAL AFFAIR
DIVISION
18 NOV 1996
N.I.O. BELFAST

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Malcolm Moss (DHSS, DOE & L) - B
PS/Baroness Denton (DED, DANI & L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Priestly - B
Mr Hill (B&L) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr MacCabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B
Mr Dickinson, TAU - B
Mr Lamont, RID FCO - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B
Mr Holmes, No 10

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

SUMMARY: TALKS 18 NOVEMBER

At the pre-brief, the major issues in prospect for the day were the meeting with the Irish on the HMG decommissioning paper, and the need to bring the Hume-Adams initiative, which was beginning to cause problems with the UUP, to a head. In the plenary, Senator Mitchell would be away until the end of the week.

The 12 o'clock plenary adjourned after only 20 minutes until Wednesday in order to allow bilaterals on decommissioning proposals

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to continue, and because of parliamentary demands on MPs over the next 2 days. Only 4 participants - the NIWC, DUP, UKUP and UUP - had taken the opportunity offered last week to submit a further paper containing their proposals for taking decommissioning forward, and the Unionist parties were pressing other participants, particularly the two Governments, to put in papers.

The Secretary of State began the meeting with the Irish by sketching in the position so far - the failure of the 1 October joint conclusions paper to gain support. He said that the HMG paper was our response to the Unionists' refusal to allow the pan-nationalist front a veto over progress on decommissioning while the parties were in substantive negotiations, and demonstrated that the Government was prepared to move in an attempt to meet this problem. The Irish clearly saw the paper as a return to Washington 3 - a position the Secretary of State refuted - and said they could not agree to a process which meant Sinn Fein would never enter talks.

It was pointed out that the major point of difference between the 1 October and the HMG papers was that the Commission could offer a judgement of when decommissioning might start, although it could not make the decision. Sean O'hUiginn described the paper as "doomed to failure" and "worse than a farce". He said the Commission would not get co-operation where it needs it - from the paramilitaries - and it would ensure the political parties stay in thrall to their associated paramilitary groups. The Secretary of State pointed out this was true of any scheme unless decommissioning only began at settlement stage, which was outside Mitchell. The meeting ended on a slightly happier note when Mr Coveney gave an assurance that the Irish Government were still prepared to search for a compromise. He said the most desirable outcome was for a consensus by the two Governments which would put maximum pressure on all parties.

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In a bilateral with the UDP, they expressed gloom about progress on the decommissioning issue. In their view, the UUP way through the impasse was to erect a barrier to Sinn Fein's entry. This would be unacceptable to the SDLP as well as republicans. The UDP would not speculate however on what entry conditions should be applied, saying the Sinn Fein/IRA position was not stable and it was therefore not possible to be firm about terms and conditions. Rather it was up to Sinn Fein to do the convincing. To the Secretary of State's comment that he would be looking for "deeds as well as words" associated with any new IRA ceasefire, Mr McMichael pointed out that in paramilitary circles, words, and maintaining consistent positions, carried great significance; words therefore might be more reliable.

The meeting ended with a rather acrimonious exchange on prisoners, and the HMG failure to make appropriate concessions to loyalist prisoners.

In the bilateral with the UUP, Messrs Trimble and Maginnis complained bitterly about being left "out of the loop" on Hume-Adams, and the deleterious effect this had on their ability to work through a compromise on decommissioning. Implicit in their complaint was that the SDLP was being kept better informed by the Irish. They were also much exercised by the Secretary of State's response to Martin McGuinness in his Manchester Speech, complaining that the Government was being trapped into conciliating Sinn Fein.

The Secretary of State pointed out that Trimble had been kept informed of the Hume-Adams initiative ("but I've seen no papers") and that the Prime Minister had promised to let him see the text before it was published. When pressed for their position on Sinn Fein coming into talks, Maginnis said "realistically, no", and Trimble said the way out of decommissioning was for HMG to refine the Sinn Fein entry conditions. Their main fear was to be left as the only unionist party in the talks with Sinn Fein in the process.

(Signed)

JULIE MAPSTONE

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