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FROM: QUENTIN THOMAS
POLITICAL DIRECTOR (L)
7 November 1996
QT/MR/71426

Julian 8/4
Useful ^{on} 1/28 + SDCP
alludes
9/11
PA
Talks

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) cc PS/Michael Ancram (L&B)
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Steele
Mr Bell
Mr Leach
Mr Ray
Mr Stephens
Mr Watkins
Mr Wood (L&B)
Mr Beeton
Mr Hill
Mr Lavery
Mr Maccabe
Mr Perry
Ms Bharucha
Mrs Mapstone
Mr Budd Cab Office
HMA Dublin
Mr Lamont RID/FCO
Mr D Campbell Bannerman

NOTES FROM CASTLE BUILDINGS

I should report two points from the corridors of Castle Buildings yesterday afternoon.

2. First Mr Mark Durkan and Mr Sean Farren expressed to me their concern about how we would emerge from the decommissioning impasse. They would like a bilateral meeting with HMG. They had felt encouraged by the exchanges with the UUP in Plenary earlier in the week, but Mr McCartney had dragged everything back again. I said that we would welcome a bilateral ourselves. I encouraged them to look at the Alliance proposals in a positive way. (Shortly afterwards the Secretary of State began to question Dr Alderdice in a way designed to encourage him to expose again his proposals for establishing the International Commission soon. Interestingly Mr Durkan and Mr Farren both took up the cue and began themselves to

- 1 -

CONFIDENTIAL

QT/MR/71426-7.11.96

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question Dr Alderdice in a constructive way.)

3. I took the chance to say that one of the difficulties was that our Irish Government colleagues insisted on reading the Mitchell Report as advocating that the parties should merely consider parallel decommissioning. It was clear that this was an unappealing formulation from a unionist perspective. Mr Durkan and Mr Farren appeared to confirm that their own approach was more workmanlike: they saw a way forward as through parallel decommissioning. ✓

4. Mr Cooney separately told me, on instructions from Mrs Owen, that she had not intended to indicate that the Mitchell Report's approach to parallel decommissioning might be met if there were no decommissioning during the process. The background to this is that she had been asked, I think by Mr Robinson, whether if there were no such decommissioning during the process that was another "reality" with which the process would have to grapple. She had replied yes, with the possible implication that this was a satisfactory state of affairs and that considering parallel decommissioning amounted to no more than that. Despite a note from the Secretary of State she had not taken the opportunity of the Plenary to intervene and remove any possible misunderstandings.

5. The purpose of Mr Cooney's conversation with me was to convey from Mrs Owen that she had merely been answering a question and that she did not mean to adopt the position that it would constitute a satisfactory handling of parallel decommissioning if nothing were actually decommissioned during the process. As the Secretary of State observed later this was all very well but the public position remained unchanged.

[SIGNED]

QUENTIN THOMAS

PD (L)

OAB 6447