

CONFIDENTIAL

INT 54/96

FROM: A J WHYSALL
Political Development Team
13 November 1996

PA Tallus.

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 Leach - B
Mr Bell - 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
✓ Ms Mapstone - 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

TALKS: 13 NOVEMBER 1996

Summary

Bilaterals were held with the Irish and PUP. The Irish relayed qualifiedly optimistic - over optimistic, as it turned out - SDLP impressions of their bilateral with the UUP yesterday (due to resume today) about a resolution of the decommissioning debate. The PUP set out their position on decommissioning, and their anxiety to contribute constructively to overcoming the impasse.

CONFIDENTIAL

HK/TALKS 2756

To leave the field clear for the SDLP and UUP to find a way forward, we did not seek to meet them, nor did we unveil to the Irish (and thus the SDLP) our revised suggested conditions to the decommissioning debate. In the event, however, the UUP pulled out of a further meeting with the SDLP.

Ministers accordingly concluded that we should present our paper to the Irish tomorrow morning, and seek to introduce Mr Trimble to our thinking in the afternoon.

Detail

Meeting with Irish

Led by Michael Ancram, we called on the Irish (Mr Coveney supported by Mr Donoghue; Mr O'hUiggin was elsewhere) in the late morning. In a friendly meeting, we were given a readout, as fed to them by the SDLP, of the SDLP/UUP bilateral of the previous afternoon, at which the UUP fielded Mr Empey, Mr Donaldson and Mr Weir. The SDLP had come away somewhat heartened, thought the UUP had deferred a response on a number points to defer the meeting to be held today. The UUP had recognised the desirability of Liaison Committee, by which participants in talks might have an input to decommissioning decisions, after the Commission had been appointed. They also appeared (though this was one of the points they were to come back on) to be content with the idea of a Liaison Committee for an earlier stage, during the period when the Commission existed in inchoate form. There was no suggestion that Unionists saw the Commission having authority to order decommissioning. Optimism was however limited: on a number of points, including the central issue on what would be necessary on decommissioning in advance of negotiation beginning in three strands, discussion was avoided; and there was a general feeling of Unionist hesitancy about any movement while the position on a possible IRA ceasefire was so uncertain.

Michael Ancram reported that our limited feedback on the meeting, via Mr Donaldson, had also suggested that it was friendly and constructive. In order to leave the field clear for the UUP and

SDLP to seek to make progress themselves, we had not sought any meetings with them during the day.

We had, however, been giving thought ourselves to further development of the suggested conclusions that would maximise the common ground. We might, if there was no breakthrough between the UUP and SDLP later in the week, pass the Irish a draft.

There was a brief discussion of UUP attitudes. The Irish suggested there was unrealism in UUP opposition to arrangements in which the Irish could block developments on decommissioning: it was in fact inevitable in the nature of decommissioning arrangements that the Irish would have control of them: they had to enact any scheme, after all. We made clear that the UUP worries were as much political as substantive: they were concerned at the mischief that the DUP could make from insufficiently tight-looking arrangements. Michael Ancram stressed the positive side: we had the impression that Unionists were keen to get into substantive negotiation, and have something to show for them, in advance of elections next year. Concluding, Mr Coveney said, apparently seriously, that the Irish had hoped we would have been able to exert more influence over the UUP. Michael Ancram once again sought to dislodge from their flattering assessment of our powers of persuasion.

The Irish had also had some contact with Alliance, who were coming to see them for further discussions. Lord Alderdice had a request in to see the Taoiseach: if this went ahead, it would probably be fixed next week.

Meeting with PUP

Shortly after midday, a delegation from the PUP (Mr Spence, Mr Irvine, Mr Hutchinson, Mr 'Plum' Smith and Mr 'Winkie' Rea) called on the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram.

The Secretary of State said that he had been thinking hard about the prisons, had nothing to say yet, but hoped to have something of comfort when the meeting with the Prime Minister took place next week. This was, predictably, well received.

The discussion moved to the decommissioning question. The PUP's approach appears to be as follows:-

- they were not putting in a paper on decommissioning: to do so would merely expose them to further attacks from the DUP and UKUP; much of the thinking in their contributions to LXD remained valid, however;
- they firmly favoured the maintenance of two "tracks", which they characterised as the "peace process" and the "political process". The first of these, taking in decommissioning - and, Mr Smith suggested, perhaps other topics like policing - would need to be out of the hands of the parties, leaving them free to discuss the central political questions: they might have "observer status" in the decommissioning process;
- they therefore saw some merit in the Alliance proposal; though they would rather reporting back were kept out of the plenary and perhaps confined to a sub-committee;
- underlying this was their view, clearly spelt out, that any decommissioning was undeliverable for the foreseeable future. They had said that they were willing to act as facilitators for decommissioning: but for the present they were not even talking to the loyalist groups about it, because there was no prospect, until more confidence was built, of its being delivered. Mr Ervine assumed that this was also the position in which Mr Adams found himself. The decommissioning question must not be allowed to stymie the talks, and so accord a veto to Sinn Fein. The parties should, Mr Ervine said, seek to "light a candle, instead of shooting in the dark".

The Secretary of State said that he had been thinking hard about the prisons, had nothing to say yet, but hoped to have something of comfort when the meeting with the Prime Minister took place next week. This was, predictably, well received.

The discussion moved to the decommissioning question. The PUP's approach appears to be as follows:-

- they were not putting in a paper on decommissioning: to do so would merely expose them to further attacks from the DUP and UKUP; much of the thinking in their contributions to LXO remained valid, however;
- they firmly favoured the maintenance of two "tracks", which they characterised as the "peace process" and the "political process". The first of these, taking in decommissioning - and, Mr Smith suggested, perhaps other topics like policing - would need to be out of the hands of the parties, leaving them free to discuss the central political questions: they might have "observer status" in the decommissioning process;
- they therefore saw some merit in the Alliance proposal; though they would rather reporting back were kept out of the plenary and perhaps confined to a sub-committee;
- underlying this was their view, clearly spelt out, that any decommissioning was undeliverable for the foreseeable future. They had said that they were willing to act as facilitators for decommissioning: but for the present they were not even talking to the loyalist groups about it, because there was no prospect, until more confidence was built, of its being delivered. Mr Ervine assumed that this was also the position in which Mr Adams found himself. The decommissioning question must not be allowed to stymie the talks, and so accord a veto to Sinn Fein. The parties should, Mr Ervine said, seek to "light a candle, instead of shooting in the dark".

- Mr Ervine in particular was scathing about the UUP, and its evident fear of the DUP and UKUP. The party were thinking of their electoral prospects, not Northern Ireland's future. There was to be a bilateral between the PUP and UUP this afternoon, which "would not be gentle".

- Mr Hutchinson foresaw the return of Loyalist violence, if the IRA resumed their campaign, or if talks collapsed, (thought this was said quietly, and the delegation did not otherwise allude to the possibility).

The Secretary of State and Michael Ancram from our side stressed the nature of the Mitchell compromise, and its emphasis on decommissioning during negotiation. However long in practice it might take to secure any decommissioning, the issue had to be addressed now: and every effort made to overcome the Unionists concerns that blocking progress.

Mr Ervine asked what we "wanted from them", in the interests of "fudging" the decommissioning issue. The Secretary of State suggested there was value in supporting the Alliance proposal, or a variant of it, as a form of compromise.

Developments with the UUP

The SDLP then reported to us that the UUP, now "did not think necessary" the meeting envisaged for today with the SDLP.

They intend tomorrow, we understand, to put in to the Chairmen for circulation their suggested conclusions to the decommissioning debate.

Our Revised Draft Conclusions

Ministers accordingly decided that our suggested conclusions paper should be handed over to the Irish tomorrow (in its latest form it

is annexed to the draft letter to No 10 provided by Mr Hill today). They also envisaged that there might be a meeting with Mr Trimble in London tomorrow, in view of the anxieties he expressed to Mr Holmes this morning (Mr Hill's other submission of today).

(Signed)

A J WHYSALL

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - 5
 PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - 5
 PS/Michael Antram (B&L) - 5
 PS/Malcolm Ross (CHSS, DOW & L) - 5
 PS/Baroness Deben (DED, D&L & L) - 5
 PS/FUS (B&L) - 5
 PS/Sir David Fell - 5
 Mr Thomas - 5
 Mr Steele - 5
 Mr Bell - 5
 Mr Leach - 5
 Mr Watkins - 5
 Mr Stephens - 5
 Mr Wood (B&L) - 5
 Mr Beaton - 5
 Mr Priestly - 5
 Mr Hill (B&L) - 5
 Mr Lavery - 5
 Mr Maccabe - 5
 Mr Perry - 5
 Mr Sharkey - 5
 Ms Napstone - 5
 Mr Whysall (B&L) - 5
 Ms Collins, Oak Off (via IPL) - 5
 Mr Dickinson, TAU - 5
 Mr Lamont, RID FCC - 5
 RMA Dublin - 5
 Mr Westmacott (via RID) - 5
 Mr Campbell-Bannerman - 5
 Mrs McNally (B&L) - 5

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 1996

SUMMARY

The day was given up to wide-ranging bilateral meetings. The DUP took the opportunity to set out their stall on decommissioning in general and on the Alliance Party's proposals in particular. There was also found to re-light the fires under the issue of terms and conditions for Sinn Féin entry into talks. The SHP covered much the same ground, although from the point of view of disarming the