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LF

FROM: PS/PUS

27 NOVEMBER 1996

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
 PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
 PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - 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 Ray - B
 Mr Wood (L&B) - B
 Mrs Collins - B
 Mr Smyth - B
 Mr Marsh - B
 Mr Hill - B
 Mr Maccabe - B
 Mr Beeeton - B
 Ms Mapstone - B
 Ms Bharucha - B
 Mr Margetts - B
 HMA Dublin - B
 Mr Lamont, RID - B

MR PERRY - B

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH TIM DALTON

Tim Dalton telephoned PUS today to report on Irish Government officials' discussions with Sinn Fein and the question of the timing of the publication of the Decommissioning Bill.

2. With regard to the former, Mr Dalton said that he still believed that the process had everything to play for and that a forthcoming meeting between Irish officials on Sinn Fein (which would take place either on Thursday or Friday) could be decisive. Mr Dalton went on to say that although Sinn Fein had been caught slightly off guard by the new paper, it was clear that they wished to engage positively on it and he wanted to stress that it had not been rejected it out of hand. Things would become clearer by the end of the week.

3. Bearing that in mind, he wondered if the British side would wish to consider delaying introduction of the Decommissioning Bill as this might send all the wrong signals? He also felt that the Summit planned for 9 December between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister might have an important role to play in the process. He recognised (as did his interlocutors) HMG's difficulties with political geometry and he said that Sinn Fein seemed to be 'anxious' to get into talks before a new Government took office next year.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

4. PUS explained that there were time constraints governing the Parliamentary programme and that there was a convention of two weekends between introduction and Second Reading. He went on to say that introduction was a mere formality which usually did not attract much notice apart from its appearance on the order paper although he accepted that this might be different in the case of the Decommissioning Bill. Mr Dalton accepted the explanation but felt it might be useful, nevertheless, for consideration to be given to delaying the Bill if that were possible. PUS said that he could not give a guarantee on that due to very real pressures on the business managers, but it was still 'possible' that the Second Reading would not be able to take place until after the Summit on 9 December.

5. Both principals agreed to keep in touch over the coming days, but you will be wish to be aware of the exchange in your dealings with Department of Justice officials..

Comment

6. Mr Dalton seemed more positive than usual in describing his Government's contacts with Sinn Fein. It was interesting to note, however, that despite hints from PUS he did not seem to be aware of HMG's intention to publish the statement of government policy later on this week nor and did not seeke to dissuade HMG from so doing.

Signed

CLIVE BARBOUR
PRIVATE SECRETARY
27 NOVEMBER 1996