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From: Allen McVeigh (am)
 Julie Mapstone (pm)
 5 November 1996

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&L) - B
 Mr Steele - B
 Mr Leach - B
 Mr Bell - B
 Mr Stephens - B
 Mr Watkins - 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: SUMMARY 5 NOVEMBER 1996

The morning plenary, of just over three hours duration, continued in the questioning mode commenced towards yesterday's close.

2. Peter Robinson completed, for the time being, his probing, rather than testing (knowing the answers before he had asked his questions), of HMG's position on decommissioning through his questions to Michael Ancram. In a sense his was the warming-up exercise to an aerobics session involving, in the main, the UUP and SDLP as participants, with the rest onlookers. Reg Empey took over from Ken Maginnis at the first sign of beads of sweat on the

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latter's brow, while Mark Durkan, who gamely hung in for the SDLP until lunch, only produced the merest hint of colour on his cheeks from his efforts. The Irish, I suspect, appreciated not having to actively participate on this occasion though perhaps made a mental note to check out their fitness and stamina levels for when it becomes their turn.

From this session HMG's practical and realistic rather than a theoretical approach to decommissioning was established, together with the desire to see agreement reached among the participants on this issue. The difference in their approach to decommissioning was plainly, frankly and without rancour aired by the UUP and SDLP, with both fearful the other could use the issue as a veto for their own purposes. The debate also highlighted their different perceptions of how the plenary sub-committee proposed to deal with decommissioning would interact between the plenary and International Body's Commission. While no resolution was immediately apparent, the session ended in an upbeat mood that it should not be impossible to achieve a satisfactory accommodation for both viewpoints on the sub-committee through continued dialogue.

Ninety per cent of the afternoon plenary was taken up by Mr McCartney, firstly in a lengthy address, largely reading from a paper tabled during the morning (which has been circulated). After a short mid-afternoon adjournment, the questioning continued. This process however was also taken over by Mr McCartney with a long series of questions probing the Secretary of State's position on Sinn Fein entry requirements, which largely consisted of castigating the Government for specifying a "restoration" of the 1994 ceasefire, and demanding in particular why the word "permanent" was not a criterion.

In the rare spaces left during the course of the afternoon, there were some small signs of possible convergence between parties' positions. Reg Empey indicated the UUP would welcome a discussion with Alliance on their decommissioning paper; and the useful exchanges of the morning between the UUP and the SDLP were briefly

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continued, with some probing by the SDLP of the Unionist position on the principles of decommissioning and how far the Mitchell report met them. In a bilateral with both governments at the end of the session, the Chairman suggested he should attempt to consolidate these small signs by pushing for bilaterals, particularly between the SDLP and the UUP, after the end of the decommissioning debate. The Irish also indicated they were thinking of responding positively to Ken Maginnis' emphasis during the morning session on the naming of a Chairman designate for the Independent Commission, if this would result in useful progress.

Ray Roberts

Signed:

ALLEN McVEIGH
JULIE MAPSTONE

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