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SECURE FAX NO. 509

Date: 22.5.91

To: HQ
For: A/Sec. Gallagher

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Political Talks

Robert Alston rang at 4.40 with reference to our message earlier this afternoon which the British found very helpful:-

Mr Brooke is about to make an announcement that it has been agreed by all the participants that those plenary meetings in strand 2 which are not held in London or Dublin will be held in Parliament Buildings at Stormont; that he has been engaged today in the discussion for the guidelines for an independent chairman, one of two remaining issues; that he has consulted face to face with the Alliance and Unionist Parties and that the SDLP leader has given an input by telephone (Mawhinney); that perceptible progress is being made but more work needs to be done; and that the talks will reassemble on Tuesday to carry forward the business in which the parties are already engaged.

Referring back to our message, I said to Alston that it would help to indicate that some urgency would be attached to the resolution of the other outstanding issues.

P.S. In the statement I heard on Radio at 5.00 pm, that suggestion seemed to be reflected in Brooke's final comment that in the meantime, he, Mawhinney and officials will continue to talk on outstanding matters.

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Proposed Brooke Statement on Venue

1. Declan O' Donovan telephoned (12.55 p.m.) to say that the Secretary of State had met the Unionists this morning and would be seeing them again at 2.30 p.m. At this afternoon's meeting, he intended raising with them the question of Stormont as the location for the Strand Two meetings in the North; he would also indicate that this was his own preference. (In reply to a direct call from Mr. Brooke this morning about our attitude to his floating Stormont with the Unionists, O' Donovan replied along the lines of the Taoiseach's letter to John Major - that we were flexible on location in the North but that we would wish to see the sensitivities of the parties taken into account. Since Mr. Brooke's discussion with the Unionists would be part of the process of sounding out such sensitivities, there seemed no reason why he should not indicate his own preference in such talks.)
2. The British have told O' Donovan that the Secretary of State would wish to make a public announcement on the location this afternoon. As regards the attitude of the SDLP, Brooke feels he has in effect a commitment from Hume to Stormont. (Hume apparently told Brooke last Monday that the SDLP were prepared to meet "anywhere as long as it isn't in the Orange Lodge in Lurgan".)
3. Brooke would now wish to have our agreement to going ahead with his proposed statement on the location this afternoon - presuming of course that the Unionists will agree to Stormont. (We will try and alert Hume to the above.)

Comment

4. The Secretary of State undoubtedly wishes to make the proposed statement in order, in significant part, to take pressure off himself and to show that the process is not

losing momentum. While we would prefer any announcement on venue to be part of a package, it is difficult to see how we can refuse our agreement, given both the flexibility we have shown on this issue to date and the emphasis we have placed on resolving the three outstanding issues of venue, chairman and rules of procedure as soon as possible.

5. If agreed, the suggested terms of our response might be along the following lines:

- We would have preferred the three outstanding issues to be dealt with as a package, particularly since, as the British themselves are aware, Parliament Buildings would have clear attractions for the Unionists.
- However, we fully sympathise with the desire to maintain the momentum of the process. For that reason, we are ready to agree to a statement on venue today, on the understanding that this is followed by announcements on the other outstanding issues in the shortest possible time.

Dermot Gallagher
22 May 1991

c. c. Usual circulation

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