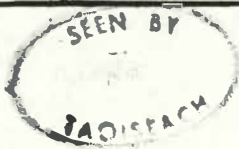




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PSM (par 15)
PSS
Mr Nally
Ambassador London
Campbell
Frank

(28)

Tearsheet
To be placed
28/11

IMMEDIATE

SECURE FAX NO. 1166

TO: HQ FROM: Belfast - 26 November, 1991 PAGES: 9
FOR: A/Sec O hUiginn FROM: Joint Secretary

POLITICAL TALKS: OPTIMISM REIGNS AGAIN

1. We were told here last Thursday that the meeting between the Unionist leaders and Mr Brooke that afternoon had been positive and we were given the agreed press line which the British regarded as significant:

Constructive and helpful meeting in which the Secretary of State and the Unionist leaders agreed to hold further informal discussions about the basis of new talks, which they agreed were desirable, involving the four main Northern Ireland parties and the two Governments. Further informal talks will take place, including at Westminster.

Questin Thomas and Robert Alston briefed me in detail today.

2. The Unionist leaders made it clear early on in the meeting that they wanted the process to continue, that it should be on the basis of the three strands, that it would be disastrous to allow a political vacuum to develop, that the prospect of an election did not provide justification for ceasing the talks process, that nothing would be agreed until everything was agreed and that they were working on the basis of the 26 March language although with modifications and refinements. The Unionist leaders used words like continue, reconvene (Molyneaux) which tended to confirm their acceptance that new talks will be on the basis of 26 March.

British Election?

3. The Unionists said that if an election intervenes when the talks are going on, "the clock will be stopped". The British side inferred from this remark that the process could then be picked up after the election but the Unionists did not commit themselves to this explicitly. Mr. Brooke tried on them the idea

that he has already put to us, namely, that at the calling of a general election there would be a meeting of the Conference. The Unionists said that was fine because "the clock would be stopped".

Allocation of time in the gap

4. The Unionists did not express any view on when a gap might start although Thomas himself suggested that they might hope to start Strand 1 before an Election but not to reach Strand 2. They certainly wanted the further round of talks to concentrate on the first strand, again on the basis that nothing would be agreed until everything was agreed. There was a hint in all of this of the condition of "substantial progress" which had taken up so much time before 26 March, but they did not actually use those words. Paisley did say that at least half the time of the gap should be devoted to the first strand. They offered the idea that meetings of Strand 3, since they only involved the Governments, could take place after the Conference ending the gap. Minister Mawhinney wondered if the Unionists were suggesting there could be a Conference also after the period allotted to Strand 1. The Unionists made it clear that this was not what they had in mind. The British wanted us to note, however, their implicit recognition that at least in theory the talks process would be going on after the gap and while the Agreement was in full running order.

Modalities and Procedures

5. What the Unionists had to say on these matters was variously described as confused, not clear and all over the place. As to venue they preferred Westminster for all talks whether Strand 1 or Strand 2, exploratory before the gap, or informal, bilateral or plenary within the gap. Brooke pointed out that this would cause difficulty for others and had done so in the past. The Unionists then said in regard to Strand 2, that the opening venue must be in London (which is already agreed) or in any event on British territory which Thomas presumed meant Belfast. Thomas pointed out himself that the venue issue had the potential to cause real difficulty.

Chairman

6. Paisley asked for a transcript of Ambassador Stevens' remarks in Australia in the summer saying that he had some doubts about his suitability. Brooke agreed to provide this. (Paisley did not ask again for the briefing the two Governments gave Stevens which he asked for and was refused in early August.) The British formed the view that Paisley wants room to "wriggle" on the Chairman and may object to Stevens. Molyneux made no comment.

r Kelly
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is objection
file

Alliance Party

7. The Unionists made some sarcastic references to the sensitivity of the Alliance leader but said they were not trying to cut out the Alliance. They had no difficulty in making that clear in the agreed press line.

Media

8. They were very conscious of the media presence at Stormont and believe the media would be much easier to handle at Westminster.

Bilaterals

9. They wanted more "bilaterals" at all stages pre-gap and during gap. In response to my question, Thomas said he understood bilaterals to mean meetings of the individual political parties (presumably Unionists together) with Brooke.

Delegation Size

10. They wanted smaller delegations perhaps three to five and said the delegations would be better with MPs. This remark was not elucidated. Thomas thought it might mean that MPs would be less obvious going to and from Westminster.

Rhythm of Work/Informality

11. They wanted the rhythm of work to be less intensive. They thought two days a week would be about right. Above all, they wanted the whole process to be more informal, not to have "everyone on parade". They did not say how their wishes in this regard could be reconciled with the limited time inherent in the

concept of the gap but they did come back to the idea brought up by Mr. Brooke at the last Conference, that they would want to see the shape of a deal before getting into the parade ring. They thought that it was because of the goldfish-bowl nature of the last set of talks that the parties did not put their cards on the table. Molyneaux made the point that the Middle East negotiations in Madrid began with "a circus" but that everybody was now moving sensibly into "bilaterals". He added that "we have had our circus" and we should be doing the same. Paisley made much the same point, saying there was no need to go back to opening statements and cross-questioning. The Unionists did suggest, however, that they could go back to the common ground paper prepared by the British towards the conclusion of the talks. They repeated their desire for informality but stressed that they could not have "negotiations", meaning, I think, anything that would be described as such, before the gap.

(Comment: The British see some interest for us in the notion of a much looser process which could, for all intents and purposes, go on with the Agreement in place while reserving the gap or future gaps for set-piece meetings organised to ratify what has already been agreed. The idea is attractive but we would have to ask whether every time a question was raised about it, the Unionists would not bolt or set new conditions and whether in these circumstances, the process would be, at the least, unmanageable and, at the worst, dangerous to the credibility of the Agreement.)

Extra Time?

12. Thomas left to last the issue which he described as the most difficult. Going back to the question of the calling of the Conference in July, the Unionists again wanted some flexibility, room for manoeuvre, which would put off a Conference if the talks were going well. They made no specific suggestion.

The Summit?

13. The Summit was not mentioned at the meeting by either side. It was clear from comments of Thomas' that if it had been, the

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British would have portrayed it as part of the preparations for Maastricht.

DUP Party Conference

14. The British side said the DUP Conference would be held next weekend and anticipated that Paisley would address the talks in his speech. They noted that neither he nor Molyneaux had said anything unhelpful since their meeting with Brooke. Thomas also noted that before their meeting with Brooke, Paisley issued a statement (provided) in which he said that the "new basis" must put beyond all dispute the three agreed pre-conditions:-

- (1) That the purpose of negotiations is to seek an alternative to and a replacement of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
- (2) That there will be no meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference during any negotiations.
- (3) That the Maryfield Secretariat must cease its operation of servicing the Conference during negotiations.

Thomas thought Paisley had issued the statement - to which he referred during the meeting - to remove the question of "new pre-conditions" which he appeared to make in the period on or about 6 August. In his Radio Ulster Newsbreak interview on 22 November (also provided) Paisley said that Mr. Brooke accepted there would not be progress without retaining the three conditions that were given to the Unionists for the first talks. Thomas pointed to this too as evidence that Paisley had moved from his position of early August and back to his position as of 26 March. He drew attention also to Paisley's remarks on the three-stranded approach that "we must recognise realistically that that is the way that it has to be done, because we want to unscramble Dublin's involvement in our affairs in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and get something put in its place."

Summary

15. The British feel they have cause for satisfaction. Throughout the briefing and in summary, Thomas spoke of the very positive nature of the meeting, the essential commitment of the

Unionists to the continuity of the three-stranded process, their reversion to 26 March language when issues were raised although more had to be done to nail them back into that statement, their desire not to leave a political vacuum and not to let the impending British election prevent progress. He acknowledged that the Unionist position was "pregnant with ambiguities and ambivalences". There were shifting sands and one could not always be sure that one knew what was being said. There was confusion in regard to procedures and modalities and there were potential difficulties ahead on that score. Basically, however, and with reference to Paisley's new pre-conditions in August and Melyneaux's dismissal of the process at his Party Conference, the Unionists had "signed on again". Mr Brooke is likely to brief the Minister personally en marge of the Summit meeting in Dublin on 4 December. I was told Mr. Brooke does not intend to make any further considered statements for the time being but he will make use of "doorstepping" opportunities including today, to express a mildly positive view of the prospects for further talks.

(Do the unionists really talking about variants of Melyneux's Westminster proposal, with the results of ^{negotiations} these ~~notions~~ to be endorsed eventually in a sanitised version of Strands 2+3?
 Ash)

21 November 1981

STATEMENT FROM DUP LEADER DR IAN PAISLEY MP, MEP.

Speaking before his and Mr Molyneux's meeting with the Secretary of State in London, Dr Paisley said,

"The onus was on the the Secretary of State to spell out what he thinks should be the basis of further negotiations for a constitutional settlement.

In his statement in the House Of Commons in July he made it clear that a new basis must be agreed. The Unionists will not be negotiating with the Secretary Of State until that new basis is agreed. It must put beyond all dispute the three agreed preconditions:-

- (1) That the purpose of negotiations is to seek an alternative to and a replacement of the Anglo Irish Agreement.
- (2) That there will be no meeting of the Anglo Irish Conference during any negotiations.
- (3) That the Maryfield Secretariat must cease its operation of servicing the conference during negotiations.