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FROM: K G DONNELLY
CPL DIVISION
20 JUNE 1990



cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Burns - B
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Blackwell - B
Mr J McConnell - B

MR HILL

GROUND-CLEARING: UNIONISTS, 21 JUNE

Mr Thomas' submission of yesterday referred to the need for a revised speaking note for this meeting. I now attach a revised draft, which will, however no doubt need further revision in the light of today's VCR meeting.

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20 June 1990

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SPEAKING NOTE FOR MEETING WITH UNIONIST LEADERS

Objectives

- To reassure the leaders that their understanding with the Secretary of State still stands;
- To try to enjoin on them the advantages of maintaining radio silence on the details of that understanding;
- To recapitulate the understanding in order to ensure that everyone is still on the same wavelength;
- To introduce discussions on the contents of a statement on the events so far;
- To reach a clear understanding about the basis on which political talks might begin (eg the procedural steps to be followed before the commencement of the gap, the steps to follow the gap, and the various administrative and housekeeping implications).

Introduction

1. Very glad to have this meeting. Timely in view of the developments over the weekend. Further meetings can be arranged as necessary to ensure that both sides have a clear and shared understanding of the next steps as we move towards a possible pause in Conference meetings, during which political talks can take place.
2. At the outset, I would express the Secretary of State's appreciation for your statesmanlike discretion on what have been some very unfortunate developments over the weekend. Wholly unclear why Mr Mallon should have felt the need to make these comments. Our understanding is that he is not speaking for the SDLP as a whole, and certainly not for his leader. The events over the weekend

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

CPL1/SAL/9436

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

emphasize the need for continued radio silence until a formal statement has been made by the Secretary of State, which he hopes to do at the Renewal debate. Do not underestimate the difficulties of getting everyone to keep a low profile until then, but tremendous dangers in off-the-cuff remarks which focus on particular details of the understandings reached, rather than setting them in the wider context.

Understanding reached

3. It may be useful if I emphasize that the Secretary of State remains fully committed to the understanding he reached with you at earlier meetings. That understanding may be set out as follows:

- Precondition 1 has been met by the Secretary of State's letter of 4 May to you, which said that the Government would consider any proposal for an alternative to the Agreement.
- Precondition 2 would be met by the announcement of a gap in Conference meetings, with some reference to the connection between this and political development;
- Precondition 3 might be met by wording along the following lines:

"As the Conference will not be meeting between dates X and Y, the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement."

- The multiple strands of any dialogue would be acknowledged by your making a statement along the following lines:

"We recognise that the implementation of any agreement on internal Northern Ireland arrangements

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CPL1/SAL/9436

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

would be greatly strengthened if agreement were also reached on the relationship between any new Northern Ireland administration and the Irish Government. This will require direct discussions between the UK team, including representatives of the Northern Ireland political parties, and the Irish Government, and we would envisage a meeting to open such discussions as soon as substantial progress had been made on the internal discussions."

4. Does this coincide with your own understanding of the position that was reached?

Timing of N/S Contact

5. Since you arrived at this common understanding with the Secretary of State on 22 May, he has been engaged in resolving the outstanding issues with the Irish Government and the SDLP. They have, as you know, expressed general support for the position reached so far (eg Haughey on 13 June, Hume on 15 June). However, the timing of contact with the Irish Government was a point on which both they and the SDLP expressed concern. If dialogue was to begin only when "substantial progress" has been made, what reassurances would they have that this point will in fact be reached? The Secretary of State has taken a firm and consistent line that the question of when such contact might be made is less important than the fact that it will be made: he has pointed out that devising a strait-jacket on timing would be unnecessary and unhelpful. Nevertheless, he has asked us to take your minds on the scope for saying something a little more specific. In any event, with all this in mind, he envisages including in the statement he would make [copy to be handed to the leaders] reference to the close interconnections between the three strands. In fact, he himself sees advantage in trying to set down a broad timetable, since that would provide an element of self-discipline all round, though he is fully aware that keeping to it could not be guaranteed.

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CPL1/SAL/9436

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6. What would your views on this point be, bearing in mind that any timetable could only be indicative, and yet that it might be helpful in ensuring further progress?

7. As regards the wording of the draft we have just handed over, the Secretary of State in fact has it in mind to seek a private meeting with you, as fellow parliamentarians, to review the text, and to discuss how you might respond to it. Would you feel that this might be helpful?

Agenda

8. The original reason for arranging this meeting, of course, was to discuss the agenda for any political talks, and to consider some other ground-clearing issues. On the agenda, we assume it would be helpful if the NIO were to draw up a draft agenda based on the views of the various parties. We are of course familiar with the document you submitted in January 1988, which gives a clear idea of the issues as you see them. Is this our best starting point, or are there different or additional points you would wish to see included in the agenda? (or have you, indeed, brought with you a new document with agenda proposals?)

Other Administrative Arrangements

9. On the procedural next steps, and the timing, it may be helpful for us to set out the Secretary of State's intentions, in the light of the discussions he has had with you and others. He envisages that we should continue these informal exchanges until we have reached the point where the pause in Conference meetings could be announced. He has taken note of your views that the gap in Conference meetings should be more than a simple holiday interlude and, taking account of this and the fact that many of the key players will indeed be on holiday at various times in July and August, his mind is moving towards September as the appropriate time to commence the pause. Do you have comments on that? How do you expect to avoid destructive comment during the next 3 months?

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CPL1/SAL/9436

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

10. [FOR USE IF NECESSARY The Secretary of State envisages that following the announcement of the pause the Secretary of State himself would hold a brief round of talks with the parties bilaterally, to ensure general acceptance of the agenda and other formal points. He would then convene and initial plenary meeting with the parties, which would be followed by further bilateral exchanges leading to the initiation of full inter-party talks. The Secretary of State hopes that the North/South talks might follow soon after that, provided that substantial progress had then been made on the internal discussions.]

11. As to the form of meetings, the Secretary of State envisages that these should in essence be a continuation of the meeting he has already held though, at the appropriate stages they will be plenary rather than bilateral. In other words he envisages a round table discussion, with himself in the chair, conducted in private and with a substantial degree of informality. At the appropriate time he will himself wish to devote all his time and energies to these important matters. He thinks it would be right to expect that there might be lengthy sessions and frequent meetings. But he believes all of this should be decided step by step, rather than imposing a rigid structure from the outset. There will of course be an agenda. Would you find officially prepared minutes helpful? Are there other procedural points you wish to raise?

12. As to representation at the meetings, the Secretary of State would wish to be guided by the parties' views. He suggests however that in order to ensure that proceedings are manageable it might be best if each party were to think in terms of being represented by two to four people of their own choice. It would of course be open to them to field alternates on different occasions, though the greater the degree of continuity achieved in the talks the better it might be.

13. We are anxious to ensure a common understanding of the public line to be taken at various stages in the process. You have already had substantive exchanges with the Secretary of State about forms of

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CPL1/SAL/9436

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words which might be deployed by you and by HMG respectively at various points in the process. We will prepare an aide memoire incorporating these forms of words and the points at which they might be deployed. If you agree we will show this to you in due course. The Secretary of State is conscious that all players must enter these talks on a basis of mutual respect and without being seen to have compromised any essential interest. Given the background and the history, he believes it follows from this that all players must exercise a considerable degree of public restraint if they are to avoid provoking unhelpful counter-statements from others. Accordingly, he hopes that Party leaders will to the greatest extent possible exercise discretion and not go beyond the forms of words agreed on. At the same time HMG will have to answer certain questions, and the aide memoire will explain the kind of response we would expect to give.

14. [Annex 1 to Mr Thomas' submission of 19 June gives a list of all the administrative points that might reasonably be covered. It might be useful simply to run through this at the end of the meeting in order to ensure that all of the issues have been touched on.]

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CPL1/SAL/9436