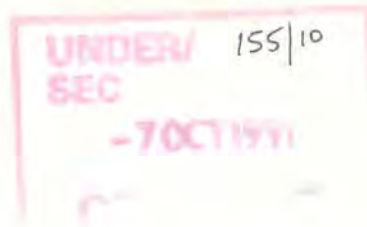


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RJA/617/91/sh

FROM: R J ALSTON
US(POL)

3 October 1991



6267.

cc PS/SofS (L&B) - B
PS/MofS (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr D J R Hill - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Petch - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Archer, RID - B
HMA, Dublin - B
Mr Gowan, Cab Office

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a Mr Haggia

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: NOTE OF MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE, MINISTER OF STATE AND OFFICIALS AND MR COLLINS, MR BURKE AND IRISH OFFICIALS: IVEAGH HOUSE, DUBLIN: 1 OCTOBER 1991

Those Present

British Side

Secretary of State
Minister of State
HM Ambassador
PUS
Mr Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Alston
Mr Fell
Mr Pawson

Irish Side

Mr Collins
Mr Burke
Mr Dorr
Mr O hUigin
Mr O'Donovan
Ms Anderson
Mr Donoghue

The Secretary of State opened by summarising his meeting with political parties. John Hume had said that he was ready to re-start on the basis of the 26 March statement, but a meeting with all three SDLP MPs was still to come. John Alderdice's position was very close to John Hume's. The Secretary of State should issue a summons

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to the parties to resume on the previous basis. The Secretary of State had met Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley in the immediate aftermath of the murder of Mr Haldane which had had as large an effect as any single security incident during his time. The meeting had therefore been substantially on security matters. They had also made much of the Belfast Telegraph report of Mr Collins' remarks before the last Conference. It was unclear whether this had been done as a "Carson Statue" but he had subsequently sent them a transcript of Mr Collins' remarks to show that there was no truth in their criticisms. On political development they had told him that they wished to build on the July conclusion and envisaged a return to the process. They had not used security or the General Election as a pretext against resumption. They had advocated exploratory talks at Westminster including John Hume but not John Alderdice, on a "Harland and Wolff" basis. There was a degree of vagueness as to whether these would be talks about talks or on substance. In reply to a question they had said that they had envisaged the Secretary of State taking part but that the talks would not be on a wholly bilateral basis. No mention had been made of any need to suspend the Agreement as a condition of such talks.

2. The Secretary of State said he had been confirmed in his belief that the Three Strand approach was sensible and that there was no resiling from it. There was some hankering after treating the internal discussion in isolation and for a sequential approach. It was evident that the effort prior to 26 March as well as the commitment to the 16 July meeting had been fully justified. Unionists had shown some nervousness about holding Strand Two at Stormont, which he regarded as an index of internal pressure. There was some feeling that delegations of ten were too many. There had been no mention of Sir Ninian Stephen. The main concern had been about the length of the Gap. They remained highly nervous, and suspicious of Irish motives. They evidently had some problems within their own community. He believed that it was worth going

forward. The stone had rolled down the hill a bit but was far from having returned to the bottom. Some flexibility would be needed to respond to genuine pressures and get them back to the table. There would be a need to talk about the length of the Gap and address the concept of injury time; to re-work how to handle the Dublin Plenary; and a number of practical details like numbers.

3. Mr Collins said the Irish Government remained strongly in support of dialogue and this had been repeated very recently by the Taoiseach. The value of the process would be in proportion to the extent to which it addressed the three relationships. He was happy to hear the Secretary of State's upbeat assessment because Press summaries he had seen had been more negative. There had been references to re-negotiation which had led the Irish to think that they wanted to restart talks about talks from the beginning.

4. The Secretary of State said there had been no references to flawed processes. They had picked up an answer about re-negotiation which he had given in the House of Commons. Mr Collins commented that it was wrong to depend on Unionist public statements. Mr Burke said that there was surely public pressure to get under way. The Secretary of State said that there was some pressure on Dr Paisley from his Church which mattered more to him than his party. There were pockets of criticism which meant that he had a need for something to be seen to have happened. The Minister of State said there was a need to tie Dr Paisley's head and heart together - there was a tension between them. It was also important to the Unionists to continue to act inside the Gap and to show that there had been no fudge across the 16 July Conference. He did not believe this was qualitatively significant, but more a loin cloth.

5. Mr Collins commented that it would be very unwise to start unravelling the process. There needed to be stringent safeguards against undermining the Agreement. On venue this should be looked at between now and the next meeting. The Australian Foreign

Minister had asked him recently about Unionist views on Sir Ninian Stephen.

6. The Secretary of State said that everyone was aware that Mr Molyneaux was not a passionate enthusiast for the process, but it was a difficult one for him to resist especially if Dr Paisley was bringing him along. Mr Collins said that changes on some issues would be serious, for example on how meetings were to take place. If the balance was upset it would cause great difficulties. The Secretary of State confirmed that he thought that it was logical to proceed on the same basis as before. He did not wish to repeat all of the previous fifteen months discussion. The Minister of State commented that some in the UUP were enthusiastic about proceeding on a footing close to the previous one. In reply to a question from Mr Collins the Secretary of State said that he had not much to add about the Gap. It added up to a need to be confident that there was enough time to get things done, taking into account the evidence the two Governments have given of their adherence to commitments once made. Unionists might have thought that the Governments would give way in July. Mr Collins said that the Irish could have agreed a long a Gap at the outset but had to stick to the commitment. Any lengthening of the Gap would cause serious problems. The Secretary of State emphasised that he was talking about a gap which was longer but not open-ended. Mr Collins said that claims for injury time would be difficult. The Secretary of State said that he was not in favour but that we would need a concerted reply as to why not.

7. Mr Collins, referring back to Dr Mawhinney's reference to "fig leaves" said that some things were immutable. The Minister of State confirmed there had been no discussion on the record of any changes to the three original pre-conditions, nor a concerted attempt to re-open them.

8. At the Secretary of State's request the Minister of State spoke briefly about his proposed dinner with party representatives. He

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had suggested it in July as a means of exchanging reflections about the Summer round. He had approached the parties at sub-leader level and all had agreed to take part as a one off event. He sensed quite a strong desire to progress matters and a sensitivity to community pressures. The dinner should keep the dialogue going and could stray on to discussion of the future. All four party leaders were aware of and had agreed to the dinner taking place. He felt that all of this reflected that there were now forty active participants not just the four leaders, and that dialogue was possible at a greater level of openness than in his six years service in the Province. Mr Collins said he hoped to hear afterwards what had taken place. The significance was that people were talking to each other.

9. Reverting at Mr Collins request to the question of venues, the Secretary of State confirmed that the Unionists had made no specific suggestions. The suggestion for some discussions at Westminster might be a proxy for seeking to transfer part of the substantive talks to a London venue. He believed the process would end up back at Stormont. The Minister of State commented that there was some genuine concern about media intrusion and a need for a more isolated forum.

10. Mr Collins asked where the Secretary of State intended to move from here. The Secretary of State replied that he proposed an early discussion with the SDLP to sound them out on the Westminster proposal and then possibly a further discussion with Unionists before 17 October. He saw some virtue additionally in a meeting of officials before 17 October to look at any changes in the ground rules which the two Governments could contemplate. He envisaged these being at the level of degree and detail and not of principle. Mr Collins concurred.

11. After Mr Collins and Irish officials had left the room the Secretary of State debriefed the British party briefly about the

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earlier tete-a-tete discussion. This had concentrated on his interview with Frank Millar and had involved some fairly frank speaking. The principle concerns expressed had related to whether the Secretary of State's posture could be seen as totally even-handed, and to his commitment to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Minister of State commented that he had wondered whether the concerns were genuine or whether a marker was being put down on the basis of which the interview could be called in evidence in a subsequent different approach.

[signed]

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