

F 1: PUS
28 MARCH 1991

14 APR 1991

Mr Thompson 2711
No action required by us!
2 MAR 91
See P/A
4/1

DESK IMMEDIATE

cc. PS/Paymaster General (L&B) - B
PS/Minister of State (L&B) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Fell
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Chesterton - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr D J R Hill - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr Archer, RID, FCO - B
HMA Dublin - B

Mr Cooke
Mr Lavery
Mr Joseph
For information.
DZ
3/4

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE

POLITICAL TALKS: PREPARATIONS

Mr Hill's helpful note on practical arrangements will be complemented by a paper (which we can prepare next week in time for the Secretary of State's return) on our own preparations both as the holder of the chair in strand one and as the HMG team.

Some Key Questions

2. It will need to cover for strand one, inter alia:

- (i) Composition of the HMG team (I suggest the Secretary of State, the Minister of State, myself and Mr Fell, and Mr Pilling with Mr Thomas as the first alternative).
- (ii) Support for our different functions - Conference chairmanship and secretariat; HMG's own intelligence and information gathering and opinion-forming; facilitation among the participants; and the media aspect.
- (iii) The Daily and Weekly Programme of meetings, briefing and work in the Office, and in the talks setting, both formal and informal/social arrangements.
- (iv) Coordination and Liaison Arrangements with Whitehall, with the Northern Ireland Departments, and with the Chief Constable and the GOC/MOD.

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Tactical Approach

3. More broadly, we shall want to form an overall tactical approach for achieving our objectives in strand one. I have had some useful preliminary discussions on this with Ministers and official colleagues (including Northern Ireland Permanent Secretaries and some with experience of previous rounds of talks) and there is some consensus that there needs to be from early on as much emphasis as possible on issues and prospects which hold out some positive political attraction for the participants (rather than exclusive emphasis at the start on difficult constitutional and mechanical questions); that both for educative and persuasive reasons we should seek to introduce discussion of the real content of government - ie current policy and resource aspects of potentially devolved activities, perhaps with a series of very short presentations from Departments, and that we should actively plan for and exploit the social aspect of the talks.

Ministerial and Official Arrangements

4. The Secretary of State will work to consider how best to utilise the full range of Ministerial experience and effort available in the NIO Ministerial team (given that we shall have to continue to run the NIO and Northern Ireland Departments and meet at least a minimum of Whitehall and Westminster commitments. It might be helpful to discuss that early in the week of his return. As to NIO staff resources, we are considering how best to deploy those both in the front line and various support activities for the talks and to maintain other essential activities - a particular concern is that the whole of the London side at Under Secretary and above will be spending most if not all the time in Belfast. There will however be some spare capacity - allowing for the sensitivity of deploying it in full view of the Unionist delegations for the duration in our side of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat.

HMG Position Papers

5. A nearly complete set is already in being and will be circulated shortly.

Signed:

J A CHILCOT

28 MARCH 1991

JEN/L/3/54/22876

FROM: D J R HILL
CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DIVISION
27 MARCH 1991

cc PS/Paymaster General (L&B) - B
PS/Minister of State (L&B) - B
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Mr Pilling - B
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Mr Thomas - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Chesterton - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr Archer, RID, FCO - B
HM Chancery, Dublin - B

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) - B

POLITICAL TALKS: PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

It is now necessary to address the practical implications of yesterday's statement.

Conference facilities

2. A new Talks Administrator has been appointed and will now co-ordinate the implementation of the contingency plans drawn up last year. I have already been in touch with the Works Service who confirm that they have sufficient alternative accommodation for staff who will need to be decanted from Parliament Buildings and believe they can complete the necessary refurbishment work within four weeks. To get everything ready in time it will be necessary for this programme of work to be carefully articulated with the necessary staff moves, installation of equipment, identification of messengerial and administrative staff for the talks and so on. The task will be discharged by the Talks Administrator reporting to me and operating under the guidance of a Steering Group chaired by Mr Thomas.

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3. We have made the working assumption that the talks will take place for three full days (Monday-Wednesday) each week.

4. The direct costs of establishing suitable Conference facilities at Parliament Buildings are likely to be of the order of £125,000 plus £65,000 per month, a total for talks lasting ten weeks of approximately £300,000.

Dates

5. It will be necessary to agree the period of the talks with the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland parties, though there is a general expectation that they will start at the end of April and run for 10 weeks. For reasons already discussed with the Secretary of State this appears highly suitable. A Conference on 29 April with talks starting on 30 April will allow a week of talks before there was any possibility of a General Election being called and, assuming no interruptions, the 10 week period would elapse shortly before the Twelfth. (An IGC on 9 July would allow exactly 10 weeks for talks). Starting the talks at the end of April will give us time to make the necessary practical arrangements and prepare ourselves; it will give the parties time to organise themselves; and it will provide an opportunity to dispose of any outstanding Conference business.

6. The Secretary of State may find it helpful to know that local elections in the Republic will take place on 27 June. These are likely to be crucial elections in domestic political terms and it is difficult to foresee what impact they may have on the Irish Government's attitude to the talks. It seems likely that the Irish Government would milk for all they were worth the meetings between themselves and the Northern Ireland parties which should have taken place by then. If no such meetings have taken place the campaign could be fairly bitter.

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The Northern Ireland Parties

7. It seems desirable for the Secretary of State to have some further formal contact with the parties before he goes on leave. The aim would be to prepare the ground for official - level contacts on general administrative arrangements and to open a discussion on the precise timing of the talks. I attach a draft letter for consideration at Annex A.

The Irish

8. The dates of the pre and post - gap Conferences will of course need to be settled with Mr Collins, who has yet to give a view on whether he would like to have one or two Conferences before the start of the "gap". Officials recommend that the Secretariat should be asked to explore with the Irish Side:

- a. the possibility of holding a Conference on 29 April to signal the launch of the talks. A fallback might be to hold a Conference on 26 April;
- b. whether we are right to assume that Mr Collins would like to maintain the plans for a Conference on 9 April as well as the proposed Conference at the end of the month.

9. The Secretary of State may feel that he should write to Mr Collins to acknowledge the Irish Government's statement of 26 March and to prepare the ground for the conversations referred to above. A possible draft is at Annex B.

Venue of North/South Talks

10. This will need to be considered at an early stage, although we may decide - for tactical reasons - not to seek to resolve the issue for some time. Facilities will be available at Parliament Buildings, which would also be the best location from a security perspective. If the option were put to them now the Irish would

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probably reject it but the Ambassador would not rule out the possibility that they could be brought to agree to it at the right time. There are strong practical reasons for holding the "internal" and North/South talks in close proximity, ideally in the same building: this would facilitate the interlinkage between the respective discussions which seems both inevitable and desirable. Once the process has started and delegates to the internal talks have come to appreciate the practical value of the facilities which are to be provided, they may be more ready to accept and recommend the advantages of remaining in the same place when the North/South talks start.

11. Our first fallback would be to seek an alternative location in Northern Ireland at which the North/South strand could be launched before transferring to Parliament Buildings, on the understanding that a later meeting would be held in Dublin. A second fallback would be to launch that strand at a non-government location in Scotland (or Wales or the Isle of Man): England and the Republic being likely to prove unacceptable to one side or the other. Any such launch meeting might be a 2 to 3 day session on a residential basis, which could have its own value. If we are forced to avoid Parliament Buildings for the North/South talks we should aim to find a venue in Northern Ireland which is secure, accessible and reasonably close to Stormont.

12. We will consider the practicalities and submit further advice after Easter. For now, if the Secretary of State is content, we will not broach the subject with the Irish or with the parties, but note any suggestions or comments they may make.

Signed: David Hill

D J R HILL
Constitutional and Political Division
27 March 1991

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DRAFT LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO:

The Right Hon J H Molyneaux, JP, MP

Reverend Dr I R K Paisley, MP, MEP

J Hume Esq, MP, MEP

Dr J Alderdice

I am grateful to you for responding promptly and positively to my letter of 14 March. We now truly have an opportunity to make a new beginning for Northern Ireland and address the wider relationships which bear on the situation here, and to seek a comprehensive political accommodation likely to gain general acceptance.

The next step clearly is to proceed with the necessary practical arrangements and I have asked my Permanent Under Secretary or his Deputy to be touch with you, or a nominated representative of your party, within the next few days to take these matters forward.

On timing, I suggest that we aim to launch the formal talks process by the end of April. I hope that will give all parties time to prepare themselves.

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[I know that you harbour no illusions about the difficulties which still lay ahead on the path towards a satisfactory outcome from this process. For my part, I can assure you that the Government will not be stinting in its efforts to secure an agreement.]

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DRAFT LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO

Mr G Collins, TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Department of Foreign Affairs
St Stephen's Green
DUBLIN

I warmly appreciated the terms of the statement made by the Taoiseach on Tuesday afternoon. I share your Government's belief that we now have the opportunity to secure a qualitative improvement in each of the sets of relationships which the talks are designed to address.

My officials will be in touch with yours through the Secretariat to discuss the practical consequences of the position which has now been reached and, in particular, to explore the possibility of launching the talks at an Inter-governmental Conference at the end of April.

I look forward to our meeting on 9 April. For now I should like simply to record my personal appreciation for your own contribution to the difficult and protracted process on which we have been engaged and to acknowledge the significance of your Government's efforts to overcome the obstacles and open the way to substantive exchanges.

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