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FILE TITLE:

Talks

SERIES

NORTHERN IRELAND

PART:

3

PART BEGINS:

1 February 99

PART ENDS:

7 JUN 2001

CAB ONE:

Labour Administration

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DATE CLOSED	7 JUNE 2001
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Series : IRELAND

File Title : TALKS

Part : 3

Date	From	To	Subject	Class	Secret
01/02/1999	NIO	FA/PS	Co-ordinating Group on a Political Settlement : 45th meeting	U	0
05/02/1999	NIO	FA/PS	Co-ordinating Group on a Political Statement:46th Meeting	C	0
21/05/1999	NIO	FA/PS	Co-ordinating Group on a Political Settlement: Sixtieth meeting	C	0

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cc COS
FAHPS
VAPress

FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
BLOCK B, CASTLE BUILDINGS
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Tel Belfast (01232) 520700

John Sawers Esq
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

~~forced~~
21 May 1999

Dear John,

CO-ORDINATING GROUP ON A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT: SIXTIETH MEETING

The Co-ordinating Group met on 20 May and reviewed developments across the office. In addition to the key political discussions with the parties, with which you are closely involved, there are several items worth recording.

Northern Ireland Political Opinion

Feelings have been intensifying on both sides during the week. Amongst nationalists, there is a strong sense of frustration and anger at the ongoing stalemate. On the unionist side, there is considerable confusion about the nature of the proposals which Trimble may or may not have agreed to. The level of criticism against Trimble is also beginning to grow, sometimes in the form of faint praise, including from within his own party.

There had been some belief amongst unionists that Trimble was working towards a satisfactory (from their point of view) resolution at Drumcree in part return for movement on the wider political front. This has been removed by comments from the local residents that, whatever solution might be reached, it would not involve a parade down the Garvaghy Road.

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SKP 26/5/99



Initial indications are that Jim Nicholson's campaign is not going well due to a number of factors - his own political standing, his personal life and the wider divisions within the party.

Policing

Over the next weeks, Ministers will be using a number of opportunities to present a more positive picture of the RUC and the Government's support for it. This needs to be carefully balanced, but it is clear that the police are suffering from the recent barrage of criticism and this is contributing to the growing Unionist unease.

Security

Reports indicate heightened sectarian tension in some parts of Northern Ireland, particularly North Belfast - not unusual at this time of year. Attacks by Loyalists have been continuing including a petrol bomb attack in Larne and a shooting in Carrickfergus. As a result, the Army has been deployed in support of the RUC in the evenings in some areas of Antrim.

Negotiations continue over Drumcree. Frank Blair yesterday secured the agreement of both sides to begin the substantive stage of negotiations at the beginning of June. It is important that Trimble give Blair the necessary space for this. Meanwhile, there have been violent clashes between both communities and the security forces on two evenings this week.

Yes ever
John McKerrvill
J McKERVILL

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Rec'd by Ax 5/2/99

FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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John Sawers Esq
Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
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5 February 1999

Dear John

CO-ORDINATING GROUP ON A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT: FORTY SIXTH MEETING

The group held its forty-sixth meeting yesterday and reviewed key areas of work.

Criminal Justice

The Criminal Justice Review is planning to publish a statement of work undertaken so far. It will not indicate preliminary findings. The review team is planning to hold a series of seminars in key towns throughout Northern Ireland to ensure consultation is wide ranging. Unlike the Patten Commission, these will not be widely publicised. It is likely that the Patten Commission will be briefed on the work of the Review.

Politics

Key developments: it was clear at meetings in Dublin on Wednesday that the Irish continue to have high expectations of the security strategy paper but reservations about the current text. They fear in-fighting amongst republicans in the current unstable situation.

As you will know from Mr Trimble's meeting with the Prime Minister this week, it now seems likely that the 15 February Assembly meeting will give the necessary endorsement to the 18 December agreements. With the string of gloomy stories on the

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UVF, IRA guns in the hands of dissidents and continuing punishment attacks, it will be important to maintain momentum and focus on the implementation of the Agreement as the way to tackle these problems.

Preparations for devolution:

Implementation bodies: a working group including the UUP, SDLP, the Irish and HMG is to address outstanding issues. The domestic legislation will be less detailed than initially expected as the bodies will now be set up under powers in the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. This should speed the task of reaching agreement.

Restructuring Government: the Departments Order was debated in the Commons on Thursday and will be in the Lords on Monday.

Security

Paramilitary assaults continue on a near daily basis. The outcome of any Amnesty investigation would not necessarily be one that Trimble would welcome.

Trimble is insisting on consultation over the security strategy paper while well-informed journalists are beginning to query the delay in publication.

The Irish were informed of plans to appoint a mediator at Drumcree during the Secretary of State's meetings in Dublin. It will be essential to secure the approval of both sides to this appointment.



Information Strategy

The security situation has set the agenda over the last week with the main focus on the condition of the ceasefires. A series of media events has been arranged to project the message that the situation is serious but that making real political progress is the way forward. Those urging a halt to releases or slowing down the implementation of the Agreement are forgetting the wider political situation. Continued and determined implementation is the key.

*For ever.
N.P.*

N P PERRY

FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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Sir John Holmes KBE, CVO
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
No 10 Downing Street
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SW1A 1AA

Handwritten initials/signature

~~Handwritten scribble~~

1 February 1999

Dear John,

*C: JS
PB
AC
JPo*

CO-ORDINATING GROUP ON A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT: FORTY FIFTH MEETING

The group held its forty-fifth meeting on 28 January and reviewed key areas of work.

Politics

Key developments: the key issue for the Government is when and indeed whether to set a date for the running of d'Hondt. Trimble has been indicating that a move to specify any date for the operation of d'Hondt, in the absence of any decommissioning, would be disastrous. Not making the standing order by 15 February poses as many risks. As you will know, several options are being explored. Consideration will be given to the role that key opinion formers, outside the party political arena, could play in the coming difficult period.

The Flood Tribunal into irregular financial contributions to Fianna Fáil is putting the coalition in Dublin under strain and an election cannot be ruled out. We must consider how this would impact on the political situation in Northern Ireland.

Party Opinion: within Unionism the mood is gloomy. The feeling is that with no decommissioning there will be a serious breakdown. The daily reports of attacks create further unease. The 15 February vote will be very important and the outcome cannot be taken for granted. Senior figures within the UUP cannot conceive that the Government



might operate d'Hondt without their support. There is less pessimism amongst nationalists with some SDLP members believing that the IRA will yet make a move.

Preparations for devolution:

Implementation bodies The First and Deputy First Minister received drafts of the legislation required to set up the bodies on Monday. On five of the bodies outstanding problems should not be insurmountable. There is a large gap between the SDLP and UUP on the interpretation of the 18 December agreement on the Trade and Business Development Body. The SDLP state that no further negotiations should take place as that would re-open the 18 December agreement. A novel approach to the legislation for this body may be required. The inclusion in one of the bodies of the Commission for Irish Lights - a reserved rather than transferred matter - is being reviewed.

Restructuring Government The functions order setting out the responsibilities of each of the new Northern Ireland Departments has been completed and will be debated at Westminster next week. Work continues to have all the necessary Assembly orders in place for the 15 February debate. The determination of Ministerial functions has been drafted.

Irish dimension: there will be a Ministerial meeting in Dublin next week. The Irish are now conscious that Unionist confidence in the Agreement is waning but will still press for progress on the appointment of Ministers.

Security

The main ceasefires hold. As yet there has been no indication of who was responsible of the murder of Eamon Collins. Nearly all groups and many individuals would have motives.



The Decommissioning Commission had a productive meeting with Billy Hutchinson of the UVF this week. They responded helpfully to the nine logistical questions posed by the Commission. They also met Mr O'Donoghue in Dublin.

The final security strategy paper has been passed to the Irish. Ministers do not plan to consult the Northern Ireland parties before publication.

Information Strategy

The media coverage of this week's debate in the Commons divided between those accepting the difficult choice faced by the Government and those protesting that the Government is prepared to accept an unacceptable level of violence in order to press ahead with devolution. This must be countered with the reality that a halt in prisoner releases would not solve the problem of punishment attacks but would collapse the Agreement. While the ceasefires are intact prisoner releases will continue. It is not a matter of playing cards. The issue looks set to rise further up the agenda.

Yours ever
John Mackinnell
PP. N P PERRY