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IMMEDIATE

PST
PSS
~~Mr A. Murray~~
Mr M Munniff
Mr T Dalton
~~And Small~~
RDL
16/12

16 December 1993

Pages: 1

TO: EQ FROM: BELFAST
FOR: A/SEC O HUGINN FROM: JOINT SECRETARY

Government Statement on Select Committee

1. Martin Williams has told me that the leader of the House of Commons, Mr. Newton, will make a statement this afternoon that, following the report of the Procedure Committee, the Government has decided to undertake consultations with the parties (at Westminster) on the basis that the time for the establishment of a Select Committee for Northern Ireland has now arrived.
2. I noted that the Government was now taking the initiative on a matter that it had said repeatedly was one for Parliament, which was included in the talks process under the ground rules of 26 March 1991 which I had just recently been assured - with some asperity - that the Secretary of State still fully adhered to, which the SDLP and the Labour Party were opposed to at this time, and which the Government itself had previously indicated should await the outcome of the talks process. The Government's statement would be seen as a pay-off to the UUP and proof positive that there was indeed a "deal".
3. Williams obviously regarded the decision as a piece of realpolitik and did not try to answer these points. He did, however, suggest that the Government had some expectation of a change of mind by the Labour Party and he drew attention to the Taoiseach's response to a question on the issue at yesterday's press conference (the Taoiseach said he would not comment on a matter for the British Parliament). I said the Taoiseach's response spoke for itself; he had not given a substantive view.
4. Williams thought it likely, but was not certain, that the Government's decision was mentioned to the Taoiseach yesterday.

PST, This timing is more than a little cynical, but it would be unfortunate if while making our objectives known privately (as joint Sec + Sec Gov have done) we might confuse our public comments as to whether the proposed remarks that it is a matter for the HoC and treating it as largely procedural.

cc: Ambassador London