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*Private Secretary,  
The T arrival will need to see  
S. Hume 20.12.95.*

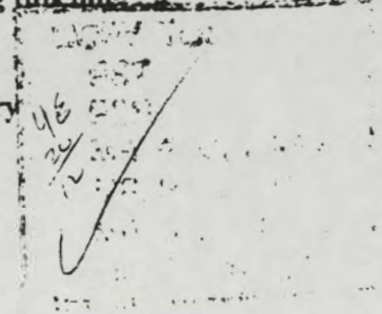
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(25) + ~~25~~  
Mr. Collins  
S.H.

19 December 1995

No of pages including this one: 4

To: HQ  
For: Second Secretary O hUiginn

From: Belfast  
From: Joint Secretary



**Subj: British Government bilateral with the DUP**

1. I have obtained the following read-out on the Secretary of State's meeting with the DUP yesterday.
2. The British side considered it to be an amicable and constructive exchange (despite some initial disagreement over the Clinton visit and its value). Paisley and Robinson were in cheerful mood and there was a lot of good-natured banter. The discussion focussed mainly on the DUP's Convention proposal (in relation to which the DUP handed over a document).
3. In an initial assessment of the Clinton visit, Paisley described this as an "awful" event which had breached promises allegedly given to him in Washington that the visit would be "non-political". He complained that it was geared solely to winning the Irish-American vote. The President knew that he could not meet Adams at Mackie's and therefore arranged a supposedly accidental encounter on the Falls. (The Shankill Road stop was mere "cosmetic cover").

Paisley also complained that no national anthem had been played at any stage during the visit.

He described his own meeting with the President, at which he had given the latter "the full weight of the DUP's perspective". There had been no response from the President.

He complained to the Secretary of State that the President had made no gesture towards the security forces during his visit (e.g., a supportive reference in one of his speeches). The Secretary of State noted that the President had met the Chief Constable.

Paisley summed up by saying that the visit had served no useful purpose and that he was not convinced that there had been genuine warmth in the reception accorded to the President in Northern Ireland.

4. As regards the International Body, Paisley expressed concern that Mitchell seemed to be "getting into a tight corner" with Sinn Fein. The Irish Government, furthermore, was backing the Sinn Fein position.

The Secretary of State replied that he was very familiar with the Irish Government's view

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of Washington Three. He had put the British Government's views on this subject to the Body in forceful terms last Friday.

Paisley expressed general scepticism about the Body and predicted that the outcome would be "a huge fudge". It was a mistake to internationalise the issue. The US thought that it now had very considerable influence in relation to Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State disagreed, commenting that the Americans knew very well who was in charge in Northern Ireland. The Body would have an advisory role only.

Paisley made clear that the DUP would not be cooperating with the Body as they considered decommissioning to be the responsibility of the British Government only.

Robinson said he had heard that much of the Body's work so far had been concerned with ideas for an elected body. (The British note on the meeting observes at this point that according to John Alderdice, this subject formed a major part of Alliance's discussion with the Body last Friday). The Secretary of State told the DUP that these ideas were not mentioned in the British Government's own presentation to the Body.

5. The meeting then turned to a discussion of the DUP's proposal for a Convention.

Paisley handed over a document which was intended as a reply to the questions raised by the Prime Minister about this proposal when they met most recently. The document will not be published but a statement based on it will be issued by the DUP in due course.

The British side were unable to provide us with a copy of the document but gave the following summary of its contents:

- The DUP are open-minded about the duration of the Convention. A year would probably be too short; they prefer eighteen months to two years, with an option to extend.
- As for the method of selection, they prefer a list system - not because of any potential benefits to themselves but because they feel that it should alleviate SDLP concerns (!). It would avoid a situation in which candidates would feel an obligation to reflect particular constituency concerns. It would also avoid the need for manifestos. A 5% hurdle would be imposed.
- The DUP detect more glimmerings of SDLP interest in an elected body - but from ordinary members rather than from John Hume. Many in the SDLP, they claim, fear that the party is being outflanked by Sinn Fein. As regards the "indexation" approach, however, the DUP have reservations about an election taking place which would not lead to people taking their places in some form of elected body.
- They indicated strong opposition to the recent Labour Party proposals (which, as I recall, are focussed heavily on indexation). A curious description of these which Paisley used was that they are "worse than Cromwell".

- The DUP favour a short election campaign.
- The procedures for the Convention would be established in accordance with past precedent (the previous Convention and the two Assemblies). The DUP do not believe that this would be contentious.
- They favour a weighted majority requirement for decision-making by the Convention. There should be a threshold in the region of 60%-70% of all those eligible to vote (i.e., not merely those present in the chamber at any given time). Amplifying this point yesterday to the Secretary of State, Paisley said that it would be necessary to acquire a majority which "went across the divide". It would also be necessary, he suggested, to decide the majority required to eject a member.
- As for the working structures, the DUP favour a mix of plenary, committee work and informal gatherings. The plenary proceedings should be broadcast but the "real work" would be done in private in informal meetings.
- It would be for each party to decide who it wanted to talk to. The question of talking to Sinn Fein would depend on the legitimacy which the latter enjoyed at the time. People could not be forced to talk to Sinn Fein.
- The Irish Government must be kept out of Convention discussions relating to Strand One matters. Strands Two and Three would be handled by committees which would have discussions with the two Governments. The committees could not be forced to meet the Governments. However, as such meetings would be part of their raison d'être, no problem should arise in this respect. (The British note observes that Alliance have made a similar suggestion).
- An independent Chairman would chair sessions between the committees and the two Governments. All other sessions would be chaired by the Chairman of the Convention.
- Finally, the DUP express a general preference for minimising public references to "Strand One, Two or Three" and focussing instead on the subjects which are at issue in each.

6. Describing the DUP's meeting with the UUP last Friday, Paisley said that the meeting went well. The UUP seemed to be moving away from their proposal for an Assembly with administrative responsibilities towards the DUP's version.

Paisley suggested - and the Secretary of State was in general agreement - that some form of elected body seemed to be gaining ground as a possible route towards the reaching of consensus over the decommissioning issue. He also claimed that the American assessment was that the SDLP were slowly being converted to this approach and that, if anything, Sinn Fein were more in favour of it.

7. In conclusion, the Secretary of State expressed satisfaction at the progress being made

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in the various political contacts to date. It was agreed that the DUP would see the Prime Minister soon (on a date to be decided) and that they would also keep in contact with the Secretary of State, who would be ready to meet them at any time if this seemed helpful.

It was agreed that this meeting would not be presented as part of the twin-track scheme.

Robinson said that one of the problems of the twin-track scheme for the DUP was that the Irish Government had joint ownership of it. It would be wrong if the Irish Government were to have any involvement in the announcement of a Convention, as this would colour the entire election campaign. The matter would have to be seen as the sole responsibility of the British Government. The Secretary of State noted this point (but, I was told, did not indicate either agreement or disagreement).

8. As for the Secretary of State's meeting with the UUP this morning, I was told that, after a "rocky start", the atmosphere improved somewhat. I have sought a detailed briefing.