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For: Paddy Teahon

From: Seán Ó hUiginn

7 June, 1996.

Pages: 1 + 7

Please see attached report from Belfast on the practical arrangements for Monday.

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To: HQ
From: Second Secretary O hUiginn

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Practical arrangements for Monday

1. We have been having extensive consultations with British colleagues here today on the arrangements for the opening of the talks next Monday.
2. The following is the present position on a number of key aspects.

Programme for Monday afternoon

The proceedings will open with the statements by the two Heads of Government. The Prime Minister will speak for 15-20 minutes. We have requested a copy of his draft remarks at the earliest opportunity and this has been promised. The British presume that, on the precedent of the Framework Document launch, the Prime Minister would go first.

The Chairman will follow the two Heads of Government. His remarks, which he will be drafting over the weekend (and in relation to which he has requested typing facilities for Sunday), will be of comparable length.

There is no clear thinking on the British side about the point at which it would be appropriate for the two Heads of Government, having handed over the chairmanship to Senator Mitchell, to withdraw.

The round of statements subscribing to the Mitchell principles will be the next item. The British Government expect that the Secretary of State's statement would take no more than 3-4 minutes. It is, of course, impossible to predict how long the individual parties would take to deal with this item.

The Secretary of State received a letter from David Trimble today which indicated

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disagreement with the proposed agenda for the opening plenary and said that the UUP awaited Sir Patrick's suggestions for the purpose of reaching agreement on the agenda. Against this background, the British expect Trimble, Paisley and probably McCartney to raise various procedural complications in the course of the afternoon.

All forecasts of the duration of the proceedings on Monday must, accordingly, be extremely tentative. On the British side's most optimistic analysis, the meeting might reach the next item, the joint statement recording commitments to the principles, but not necessarily dispose of it. In this respect, the British have (characteristically) prepared a draft of this statement which they will pass to us shortly. They envisage discussion of it with ourselves and eventually with the other participants (this despite the fact that the item is worded in such a way as to incorporate the possibility that the matter might be left to the Independent Chairman).

Taking all of the above into account, it seems very likely that the opening statements by delegations will not be reached until well into Tuesday morning. This will need to be borne in mind in planning the Tánaiste's travel arrangements for Tuesday.

As for the rest of the week, the British expect the talks to run up to, and including, Wednesday. Thursday is not possible for the Secretary of State because of NI Questions as well as a Cabinet meeting. I asked about the plans to convene the Forum on Friday and was told that, although the Secretary of State spoke merely of his "present hope" to do so in his letter to the parties, he feels that the date has now taken root to the point where it will have to be convened on Friday. The British side fully accept, however, that the talks have absolute precedence over the Forum in terms of scheduling.

Arrival arrangements on Monday

The parties are being encouraged by the NIO to arrive at Castle Buildings in the course of the morning. A buffet lunch will be offered. The Secretary of State will arrive around 1pm for the purpose of "mingling" with delegates. Details of the Prime Minister's timing are not yet to hand but he is expected to arrive around 1.45pm.

We have indicated that the Irish Government delegation will also arrive shortly before the 2pm start.

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The British side are proposing, on security advice, that the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and accompanying Ministers would be transferred to the venue by helicopter in order to avoid the Sinn Féin protests which are expected at the various entrances to the Stormont estate (see below).

Sinn Féin

The British claim to have specific information to the effect that the Sinn Féin "talks team" and a large number of supporters (50-60) will seek access to the Castle Buildings venue for the purpose of staging a protest.

Their present plan is to have the Sinn Féin vehicles stopped by Stormont security guards at the entrance to the Stormont estate, to allow the talks team to proceed by car to Castle Buildings and to permit the supporters to continue on foot but only as far as the Carson statue (on the grounds that the road from there to Castle Buildings is not open to the public). The talks team (Gerry Adams and five colleagues) would be allowed up to the barrier dividing the outer car park from the inner yard at Castle Buildings. There would be a low-key uniformed RUC presence monitoring developments.

I have emphasised the need for discreet and sensitive handling of any Sinn Féin demonstration. A heavy-handed confrontational approach on the part of the RUC would play directly into the hands of the Sinn Féin protesters and reinforce the image of injustice which they will be hoping to convey to the world media. I have suggested that consideration be given to allowing the supporters to proceed up to Castle Buildings, given that only those with badges can gain access from there on.

The British have in mind a short joint statement from the two Governments which would restate the known position on admission of Sinn Féin to the talks. They would ideally like it to be read out to the media by the two Governments. They supplied the attached draft for our comments. They also wondered about allowing the Sinn Féin talks team to enter the building for the purpose of having this statement delivered to them directly by the two Governments.

While making clear that I would need to obtain the views of our Ministers on this matter, I expressed fundamental reservations about the proposed British approach,

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which seemed likely to provoke the very confrontation and polemics which the two Governments should be trying to avoid. If it is considered necessary to issue any statement, this should be a one-liner recalling the two Governments' position without further elaboration. It should issue in the normal way to the media and should not be read out by anyone. If Sinn Féin wish e.g. to hand in a letter, this should be accepted without comment by the relevant Private Secretaries (you will recall the unfortunate encounter between a NIO technical officer and Gerry Adams at the entrance to Castle Buildings some months ago).

I suggested, furthermore, that Sinn Féin might be admitted to the building for a brief meeting with Senator Mitchell and his colleagues (rather than with the two Governments, which would inevitably be a contentious and unhelpful encounter).

These ideas are to be reflected on by the British side.

DUP

We enquired about indications of any plans by the DUP for protest action on Monday. The British have no information at this stage. Like all other delegations, the DUP will be confined, once they pass the Castle Building gates, to accredited talks delegates.

Media arrangements

The British do not envisage going beyond some panning shots by TV crews at the outset of the meeting.

Provision may also need to be made, however, for photocalls on arrival which would involve, for example, the two Governments and the Independent Chairman - or possibly this group and all the party leaders.

The British agree that it might be useful for the Chairman to issue a short press release at the conclusion of the day's proceedings (on the 1992 precedent). I have asked for details of the briefing activities planned on the British side (interviews, background briefings etc.)

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Seating arrangements in conference room

We worked today on a possible seating plan for the conference room, whose four-sided table accommodates a total of 48 (with seating behind for up to 65).

It is suggested that the three Independent Chairmen and their principal staff would sit along one side (opposite the entrance to the room) and that the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister would sit on either side of them. The respective Government delegations would sit at the top of the adjoining sides.

It would then be a question of accommodating the nine parties (five of whom will have three people at the table, with the remaining four having only two). Probably the least contentious basis for doing so would be to seat the parties according to the alphabetical order used by the Secretary of State in recent correspondence. The only question then would be whether to work clockwise or anti-clockwise. The former would place the UUP beside the British Government while the latter would place them beside us. The British, not surprisingly, see merit in the former arrangement.

We undertook to propose a seating plan of this kind to our Ministers. I have, however, indicated that we might opt for the anti-clockwise version (which would place the UUP beside ourselves and Alliance beside the British Government).

Mr Dowling and I conducted a detailed inspection of the conference premises. We have asked the British side to improve the tea/coffee arrangements (which are at present inadequate), not least with a view to promoting contact and interaction between delegations.

Secretariat for the Independent Chairman

While pointing out that the procedural guidelines are not explicit on this, the British recognise that it is on balance preferable to detach one or two individuals from each administration for the exclusive use of the Chairman as note-takers. This would be done on the basis that the notes taken would be copied automatically to the two Governments. No candidates have been identified on the British side so far but exploration is continuing. A NIO secretary who assisted Sir Ninian Stephen in 1992 has already been made available.

I have pressed the British to let us know their proposals as a matter of urgency. I have flagged the likelihood that one or two individuals will be supplied from within our own system, details to be confirmed over the weekend.

Information booklet

Finally, we are preparing here a detailed information booklet for the Irish Government delegation which will contain maps of the conference venue and all other relevant organisational details.

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DRAFT STATEMENT BY BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS

This is a joint statement issued by the British and Irish Governments. Sinn Fein are not at today's talks because there has been no restoration of the August 1994 ceasefire. Both Governments agreed this on 28 February of this year in a Joint Communique which said: "The resumption of Ministerial dialogue with Sinn Fein and their participation in negotiations, requires the restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994".

That remains the position - and that is why Sinn Fein voters are being denied representation at these talks - because the Republican Movement will not lift the shadow of the gun from Northern Ireland.

Until it does Sinn Fein will continue to exclude themselves - and those they represent - from these negotiations.

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