

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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To: HQ
For: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Meeting with Secretary of State - 21 June 1999

1. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State had an hour-long meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at Iveagh House yesterday

2. Present on the Irish side were Secretary Gallagher, Ray Bassett and the undersigned. The Secretary of State was accompanied by Bill Jeffrey and Nick Perry.

3. The following is a summary note of the meeting.

4 The Minister suggested that discussion might focus on (a) the prospects for agreement by 30 June; and (b) what the consequences of failure to meet that deadline might be.

He observed that Trimble seemed to be in downbeat form at present. Apart from the disappointing election outcome, he had problems with Jeffrey Donaldson. There was also ongoing tension between John Taylor and Ken Maginnis.

Sinn Fein, for their part, had done very well in the elections both North and South. We would have to see whether it would be possible to get a "war is over" statement from Sinn Fein. The Minister would be pressing for this, with ideally a supporting statement from the IRA (however difficult this might be to achieve), at a meeting in Belfast today with Martin McGuinness.

We would also need to explore a form of words for De Chastelain indicating confidence that decommissioning will take place by May 2000.

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Whether these statements would be enough to meet UUP concerns, however, was far from clear. As the Secretary of State had said in an interview with David Frost on Sunday, we would all have to be optimistic.

5. The Secretary of State welcomed this opportunity for the two Governments to meet at the outset of a crucial fortnight. She suggested that it might be best to avoid Ministerial discussion of any "Plan B" scenario for the moment and to leave this aspect to officials until perhaps the weekend (in order to reduce the risk of unhelpful media speculation).

The Prime Minister hoped that it might be possible to form the Executive on the basis of Sinn Fein and IRA language and some indication of a timescale involving May 2000. If it was to be formed without product, however, there would have to be a "back-stop" of some kind.

6. Gallagher agreed with the latter point, mentioning that Trimble was worried that he might have to walk away on his own if there was no decommissioning by May 2000. However, any exclusion of Sinn Fein in those circumstances would go beyond the Agreement and would not be acceptable. He suggested that a review informed by a definitive De Chastelain report might be one way forward.

The Secretary of State saw a need for some arrangement which Sinn Fein would not regard as contrary to the Agreement. We would need to look at the detail of this.

7. Gallagher observed that, while Sinn Fein's position was valid in legal terms, in political and moral terms it was not. It was in Sinn Fein's own interest to move to salvage the process.

8. Turning to the arrangements for this week, the Minister expressed doubts about a British idea that the Taoiseach and Prime Minister might come to Northern Ireland on Thursday/Friday to meet the parties. While this would of course be a matter for their own judgement, the key period for their engagement would probably be Monday/Wednesday next week. An earlier start could raise unhelpful expectations about progress being made in advance of the weekend. He suggested that they might instead meet in London on Friday, given that the Taoiseach would be attending Cardinal Hume's funeral that day.

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9. The Secretary of State agreed. The British thinking had been that it might not be wise for the Prime Minister and Taoiseach to begin "cold" next Monday. In addition, the parties would need to have time in which to deliver their inevitable rejection of opening proposals - but without endangering the timetable for an agreement by Wednesday. As the Prime Minister might intend to come over to Northern Ireland anyway in connection with the Drumcree crisis, she wondered about a possible private dinner between the two Heads of Government, say, at Hillsborough on Thursday evening.

Gallagher suggested that a get-together in London away from the pressures of Belfast would be preferable. They could work out a common approach in the light of the contacts with the parties which are envisaged at other levels for this week. They might think in terms of coming to Belfast on Friday evening/Saturday morning, to give focus and direction to the parties, and then return from Monday to Wednesday. Jeffrey seemed to agree with this approach.

10. The Secretary of State presumed that the two Governments would be delivering the same basic message to Sinn Fein and the UUP. The former would have to produce the required language and the latter would have to be willing to form the Executive without product. She suggested that Ministers might meet again later in the week, partly with a view to agreeing a line for the Sunday papers.

11. Gallagher remarked that the two Governments might ultimately have to make a judgement call themselves if the parties were unable to bridge the gap on their own. The Secretary of State asked when the Governments should make that judgement. They would have to keep up pressure on both sides to the last minute. She did not want to find herself in the position of having to make a call unless the Irish Government were happy with what she proposed to do.

The Minister made clear that he saw no alternative to the two Governments making a judgement together about the running of D'Hondt. The Secretary of State felt that signals of the Governments' determination in this matter could be given to the parties during the Monday/Wednesday period next week.

Jeffrey suggested that Wednesday midday would be the effective deadline, as the Prime Minister would have to depart for PM Questions and no doubt Unionist MPS

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would also start leaving for this reason. If there was a deal, say, on Wednesday, time would need to be allowed for the debate on the DUP motion to exclude Sinn Fein, so that the D'Hondt procedure might not in fact be run until Thursday (1 July). This would still, however, ensure consistency with the plan to synchronise devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

12. Gallagher commented, and Jeffrey agreed, that it would be unwise for the Prime Minister to engage in Drumcree talks this week unless he was certain of success, as failure could have a very negative impact on the wider negotiations

13. It was agreed that the Minister of State might come to Belfast for bilaterals with the parties this week (whom Minister Murphy will also be meeting).

14. The Minister of State asked about the demilitarisation package. The Secretary of State said that the draft paper had been kept in reserve for the right moment. Gallagher observed that this paper, while it might have some merit, would not "seduce anyone" It would be necessary, as at Hillsborough, to look at a package of radical measures for the express purpose of pushing Sinn Fein and the IRA into a deal.

The Secretary of State mentioned the growing pressures on her following the murders of Collins and Downey and the attack on McGartland. If she were to reschedule the LVF but not the IRA, these pressures would increase further. She hoped that everything could be done to secure a halt to such murders, particularly over the coming period, as otherwise she would face enormous credibility problems.

Jeffrey observed that the rationale for the Hillsborough discussions had been that a start to IRA decommissioning in the short term was contemplated under the Hillsborough proposal; at present, however, there seemed to be no prospect of a start before May 2000.

The Secretary of State suggested that work should be pursued this week on the draft paper, with options included to facilitate the "big jump" by Sinn Fein and the IRA. She herself would consider whether two or three of the items sought by Sinn Fein could be "thrown into the pot". She also asked about things we might do to help

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the Unionists.

15. The Minister returned, in conclusion, to the post-30 June scenario, making the point inter alia that, even if the Assembly were suspended, prisoner releases could not be interrupted. The Secretary of State mentioned that there was a view on her side that "everything should go" in those circumstances but she hinted that she herself was in sympathy with the Minister's position. She again suggested, however, that this discussion should be deferred for a little longer.

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