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602/11
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25 NOV 1988
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FROM: J E McCONNELL
24 NOVEMBER 1988

PS/Secretary of State (L&B) [1&2] cc PS/Mr Stewart (L&B) [3&4]
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) [5&6] 2/11
PS/PUS (L&B) [7&8]
① PS/Mr K Bloomfield [9]
Mr Burns [10]
Mr Daniell [11]
② Mr. Spence 28/11

CURRENT POSITION ON THE "DUISBURG AGREEMENT"

③ PS/Sir Kenneth
POL 1

1. Following a number of discussions over the past few days with Peter Robinson, Jack Allen, John Alderdice and Gordon Mawhinney I believe that the current position is as follows:

Unionists

2. Robinson and Allen, who were commissioned by the Unionist Panel to meet John Hume, have been encouraged by their respective leaders to go ahead with this discussion. Interestingly, Mr Robinson told me that Dr Paisley had urged him to take this action and within minutes was calling Ken Maginnis a traitor because of his suggestions that the UUP should talk with SDLP. This meeting will take place w/c 28 November though they expect that John Alderdice will have already met Mr Hume this week in order to show him the agreed Duisburg formula.

3. As already reported Mr Hume had a meeting with Mr McCusker and apparently it is McCusker's report from that meeting which has encouraged them to believe there is some purpose in speaking to Mr Hume. They had originally thought of meeting him this week but now feel if the arrangements are made for next week, ie after the SDLP, Conference Mr Hume might tailor his speech with the meeting in mind.

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4. I understand from Mr Allen and Mr Robinson that the draft letter to the Secretary of State, prepared by Mr Robinson, was put on ice by the two leaders because they did not wish to be drawn into a further round of "Talks about Talks" without having any hope of achieving some success. They are apparently still smarting from criticisms which they received following the last exercise with accusations that they had been drawn into a dialogue which had been damaging to the unionist cause and, are being told by some party members, that it had been a pointless exercise.

5. The main sticking point in relation to any possible accommodation remains the unionist difficulty over the Secretariat and their knowledge that HMG has and continues to have a strong stance on this and other matters related to the Agreement. They went on to say that whatever arrangement they could make would be a "fudge" (their word) and would not stand strong scrutiny and for that reason they believe if such a "fudge" was achieved then substantive discussions should take place almost immediately to refocus the attention of the press and party members who will oppose the initiative.

Alliance

6. Gordon Mawhinney continues to be the prime mover in this exercise and he will be letting me have a copy of whatever is agreed between his party, the UUP and the DUP in relation to Duisburg. (I also hope to get a copy from Jack Allen). As reported earlier, Mr Mawhinney has been in conversation with Herr Spiecker and is aware of his efforts to meet Mr Haughey but has not, as yet, had any reports on progress. He expects to be in contact with Herr Spiecker within the next few days and will let me know the outcome of those discussions.

7. He surprised me by saying he has reason to believe that John Hume is serious about the Duisburg scenario but I think he may be depending too much on what Herr Spiecker told him and some wishful thinking on his part. He is, however, determined to see this particular initiative through to a conclusion.

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SDLP

8. I have had two short conversations with John Hume about this topic, neither of which gave me any feeling of the confidence evinced by Mr Mawhinney however Harold McCusker also seemed to be encouraged in his conversations with Mr Hume so the SDLP position should become clearer after next week's meeting (should it take place) between John Hume, Jack Allen and Peter Robinson.

Comment

9. I confirmed today from Mr Masefield that the Irish side of the Secretariat have no further information on the approach from Herr Spiecker to meet Mr Haughey. On this topic, Gordon Mawhinney was at pains to ask me if any approach had been made to HMG by Herr Spiecker and I told him none as far as I was aware - if any approach is made I should be in a position to tell Mr Mawhinney before he hears, as he undoubtedly will, from another source.

10. Jack Allen told me that Mr Molyneux has reported on two conversations he claims to have had, one with the Secretary of State and another with the Prime Minister. He assured those he told, I understand not outside his own party, that he had spoken to them in a conciliatory fashion of his good intentions. I did not comment though it is clear that this message is believed by Allen and others.

11. Peter Robinson, Jack Allen and Gordon Mawhinney all said that it was unlikely that an official approach would be made to HMG on Duisburg unless SDLP was in full agreement but each of them believed that neither HMG nor the Irish Government could afford to ignore a joint approach from all four parties.

12. I told Peter Robinson and Jack Allen that recent verbal and written attacks on the Secretary of State seem to me to be highly offensive and hardly conducive towards persuading him that there were good intentions around. Robinson nodded sagely and said that he would be surprised if the Secretary of State was unaware of Dr

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Paisley's temperament and we should bear in mind that November was the third anniversary of the Agreement and also, as Jack Allen said, the month of the Unionist Party Conference.

13. Peter Robinson is concerned about Jack Allen's ability to carry any proposals in his own party but he feels, with the support of Harold McCusker who according to Mr Robinson is the only person Mr Molyneaux really fears, it should be possible to get the support necessary for this particular initiative. Always assuming they can get both leaders to endorse an agreed approach akin to the "Duisburg Agreement".

14. I think it is worth recording that both John Alderdice and Gordon Mawhinney reminded me that the Alliance Party originally supported the Anglo-Irish Agreement because of the facility it contains to achieve devolution. They went on to say if both the Irish Government and the SDLP make it abundantly clear, by blocking every single avenue leading towards devolution, then they would have to seriously reconsider their party's position in relation to the Agreement.

[Signed by D Pearce in J McConnell's absence]

J E McCONNELL
Political Affairs Division

DP/2684