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Per

FROM: STEPHEN POPE  
Talks Secretariat  
4 July 1991

cc: PS/SofS (B&L) - B  
PS/PMG (B&L) - B  
PS/MofS (B&L) - B  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Mr Fell - B  
Mr Pilling - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr Alston - B  
Mr D J R Hill - B  
Mr Cooke - B  
Mr Brooker - B  
Mr Archer, RID FCO - B  
HMA Dublin - B

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (PB)

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a m [signature]  
9/1

PLENARY MEETING: 3 JULY 1991 (PM 3/1)

I attach the internal note of the plenary meeting between the Government Team and representatives of the Alliance Party, the SDLP, the UDUP and the UUP.

signed

STEPHEN POPE  
PB Ext 2203

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INTERNAL RECORD OF A PLENARY SESSION AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS  
ON THE MORNING OF 3 JULY

<u>Government Team</u>	<u>Alliance Party</u>	<u>UUP</u>
Secretary of State	Dr Alderdice	Mr Molyneaux
Minister of State	Mr Close	Mr Cunningham
PUS	Mr Dickson	Mr Nicholson
Mr Fell	Mr McGarry	Mr Allen
Mr Pilling	Mr McBride	Mr Empey
Mr Thomas	Mr Dickson	Mr McGimpsey
Mr McNeill	Mrs Bell	Mr Donaldson
<u>Talks Secretariat</u>	<u>SDLP</u>	<u>UDUP</u>
Mr D J R Hill	Mr Hume	Dr Paisley
Mr Pope	Mr McGrady	Mr Robinson
Mr Marsh	Mr Haughey	Rev McCrea
Mr Hallett		
Mr Watson	Mr Farren	Mr Vitty
	Mrs Rodgers	Mr Campbell
<u>Others present</u>	Mr Durkan	Mr Wilson
	Mr Gallagher	Mr Gibson
Mr Pawson		

The meeting began at 10.05 and concluded at 10.29.

2. The Secretary of State said he would begin by making some remarks from the chair. It might then be sensible to agree a press statement to be made available at the time the meeting broke up, before offering parties the opportunity to make any general remarks. At the beginning of the previous day's discussions, he had outlined the position reached with regard to content and timing. While there had been serious business during the previous week, which showed the capacity for making progress, we were faced with an impasse, due to the shortage of time as a result of the earlier procedural problems. There was, therefore, no way in which the process could be completed before the present talks came to an end, since the initial ground rules had specified that they would finish on a specified date. In this situation, it was difficult for the parties to put forward substantive proposals when there was no likelihood of a clear conclusion to the discussions. He had met the party leaders individually and collectively and it had been agreed, against that background, that it was sensible to

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bring the present series of talks to an end. It was important, however, if there was to be a resumption at some stage in the future, that we demonstrated our ability to leave the table without rancour or recrimination and with respect for what had been achieved.

3. The Secretary of State said that he wished to pay tribute, as he had done at the beginning of the process, to the courage of the parties in coming to the talks, which entailed difficulties and risks for all of them. There had been a display of mutual respect and a serious willingness to do business which showed a commitment to the common good of the Province. In the interests of ensuring an absence of recrimination, his statement to the House of Commons would be a neutral account of the position reached. It was important that such a statement should be made in view of the interest which the House had shown in the process from the beginning. He had heard the word "failure" used in the media that morning but he, for his part, did not regard the way in which the participants had discharged their duty as being a failure. There had been a real engagement, but we had been prevented from reaching a final conclusion by the lack of time. It was clear during the previous day's discussions that many of the participants felt there were lessons to be learned in the event of any resumption in the future, especially with regard to procedures. He hoped the parties would be willing to reflect among themselves and communicate their thoughts to the others. For the Government's part, the Minister of State would be willing to listen to any suggestions the parties might wish to offer. For his part, one lesson he had learned was that the process worked best when mutual respect was shown, and when the confidentiality of the process was preserved. Problems arose when delegates made their views available to the media. The resulting insecurity of the discussions entailed risks for the whole process.

4. The Secretary of State continued that he greatly valued the opportunity of taking part in the talks and was grateful to all those who had participated. He would make clear to the

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House, as his personal view, that he hoped there could be a resumption at some stage in the future, even if this had to be in a different framework. The process had demonstrated that there was the capacity to work together for the common good of Northern Ireland and also for the whole of these islands.

5. The Secretary of State then circulated the press statement and invited comments, so that it could be available when the meeting concluded.

6. Dr Alderdice proposed that the statement include a reference to the lack of any immediate prospect of a resumption of the talks as one of the factors which had prevented further progress.

7. The Secretary of State said that he recognised that, but the present process was governed by the 26 March statement, which set out the terms for the talks. The press statement had been drafted to reflect that.

8. Dr Paisley said that it was not possible to "have it both ways". The "guillotine" had come down on us as a result of the 16 July Conference. The Secretary of State asked whether this meant that Dr Paisley agreed with what he had said about the Press Statement. Dr Paisley confirmed that he did.

9. Mr Molyneaux said that the current process reflected progress from the position of Mr Brooke's predecessor, who had said that there was no possibility of suspending the Agreement. Gradually it became clear that such a suspension was possible, but it was always understood that the present talks were based on "one single period of suspension only".

10. The Secretary of State said that in the absence of further comments, he regarded the press statement as approved. It would now be issued.

11. The Secretary of State asked whether there were any further comments delegates wished to make.

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12. Mr Molyneaux said that he wished to reiterate the remarks he had made on earlier occasions regarding the tenacity, courtesy and patience shown by the Secretary of State. He paid recognition to the courage the Secretary of State had shown in taking the decision to bring the present Talks to an end. A lesser man might have "dithered" and allowed the talks to drift on to a bitter ending, which might have caused lasting damage to the political process.

13. Dr Paisley associated himself with Mr Molyneaux's remarks. The talks had been frank and open. Delegates had spoken their minds and had shown a willingness to listen to others. There had been a "wholesome debate" on matters where there was a "deep cleavage" in positions. He regretted deeply that the British and Irish Governments had not seen fit to let the process have the "injury time" necessary to make up the time lost earlier. That would always be a point of contention. It was a pity that it had not been possible to reach Strand Two.

14. Dr Alderdice also associated himself with the compliments to the Secretary of State. There had been valuable things in the current process. He particularly appreciated the way in which colleagues in the other parties had opened up in an honest way. Such discussions had not taken place for a long time previously. He had to say, however, that he had come to the present process with a feeling that there was important work to be done and he was leaving with a sense of not having fully discharged his duty. There was thus an element of sadness in the present process coming to an end. His personal experience was that the nearer one reached to an exam date, there was always a wish that the date could be moved back, but examination dates could not be moved. He hoped, however, that there was the prospect of a "re-sit" in the future.

15. Mr Hume said he wished to join with the other leaders in paying tribute to the Secretary of State, the Minister of State and their staff. He regretted that the current process had come to an end, but he appreciated the way in which the other.

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leaders had displayed courtesy and frankness. We had not always agreed but we had been straight with each other. This was especially true of the previous week when we had started to get to the "nub" of the matter. He hoped the ending of the current process would not undermine the political situation. The SDLP would do all it could to prevent this. He wished to express his appreciation to all the staff of the building and hoped the Government Team would pass this on. Dr Paisley endorsed this appreciation, adding that while his thanks "were not for the barman they were certainly for the chef". The Secretary of State thanked Mr Hume and Dr Paisley for these remarks.

16. The Secretary of State said that if there were no further comments he would close the discussion by thanking all who were present.

17. Mr Hume said that he hoped nobody would talk to the press until after the Secretary of State had made his statement. He feared however that some were already doing so.

18. The Secretary of State said that he thought the process would be better served if there were no comments until after his House of Commons statement.

19. Dr Paisley said however that the DUP were about to issue a press statement. The Secretary of State commented that he hoped this would reflect the spirit of avoiding recrimination. Dr Paisley replied that the statement would set out the position as seen by the DUP.

E C HALLETT

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