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File
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FROM: D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
6 DECEMBER 1991

cc. PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Bell
Mr Alston
Mr Cooke
Mr McNeill
Mr Brooker

UNDER/ 263/12
SEC
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CENT SEC

SIGNED: DAVID HILL
MR THOMAS

a m [unclear]

POSSIBLE DRAFT STATEMENT TO ANNOUNCE FRESH TALKS

Constitutional and Political Division

I attach a first draft of a possible statement to launch fresh talks. Afficionados will recognise that it is based on the 26 March Statement and the 14 May "ultimatum" document" (read with the Joint Unionist Position Paper of 21 May). It also reflects the points covered in Mr Collins' letter of 14 May to the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State's letter of 5 June to the two Unionist leaders.

2. The key new passages, which reflect our current understanding of the parties' positions, are in paragraphs 6 and 10. The former covers the possible arrangements for a fresh gap, showing how the promised Anglo-Irish Summit might be played in as a reassurance for the Irish/SDLP. The latter covers various format and venue issues in a way which attempts to blur the edges and end up with multi-lateral exchanges at Stormont before the end of Strand One.

3. I have not yet seen the note of the meeting with the SDLP but I understand that they gave no categoric reactions to any of the points raised by the Secretary of State.

4. Subject to any comments you and copy recipients may have, I think it might be worth showing something on these lines to the Secretary of State before Thursday to demonstrate that we have not

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"run out of gas" and that there is a credible target to negotiate towards. He might even conclude, depending on the SDLP's formal reaction to yesterday's meeting, that it would be worth tabling a text on these lines when he sees the Unionist leaders on Thursday, to help focus the discussion.

3. As hon Members will recall, following the statement I made to the House on 28 March (Official Report, col 725), talks took place

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Constitutional and Political Division

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ings, Stormont, involving the four main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party. It was understood that these talks were only one strand in a comprehensive programme of talks which were intended to address relationships within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; relations among the people of the island of Ireland; and relations between the two Governments. It was understood that it would be necessary for the Irish Government to join the discussions at an appropriate stage. The object of this programme of discussions was to reach a new and more broadly based agreement which would represent a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and within these islands. The two Governments, as co-signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, had made it clear - and this remains their position - that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement [including proposals for a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985] if that could be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all those concerned.

4. I explained to the House on 3 July (Official Report, col) that it had not proved possible to make sufficient progress with this ambitious undertaking or to launch the later strands of

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POSSIBLE DRAFT OF STATEMENT TO ANNOUNCE FRESH TALKS

1. With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about political development in Northern Ireland.

2. As hon Members will recall, following the statement I made to the House on 26 March (Official Report, col 765), talks took place at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, involving the four main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party.

3. It had been understood that these talks were only one strand in a comprehensive programme of talks which were intended to address relationships within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament; relations among the people of the island of Ireland; and relations between the two Governments. It was understood that it would be necessary for the Irish Government to join the discussions at an appropriate stage. The object of this programme of discussions was to reach a new and more broadly based agreement which would represent a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and within these islands. The two Governments, as co-signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, had made it clear - and this remains their position - that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement [including proposals for a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985,] if that could be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all those concerned.

4. I explained to the House on 3 July (Official Report, col) that it had not proved possible to make sufficient progress with this ambitious undertaking or to launch the later strands of

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the discussion in the time available. I also told the House that the leaders of the four Northern Ireland parties involved had agreed that the talks had been both "valuable and produced genuine dialogue". I expressed my own view that the talks provided a useful basis for the future.

5. In my exchanges with the parties and with the Irish Government since the Summer I have been struck by the extent of their commitment to commence fresh talks, building on the experience of the previous talks. [The importance and urgency of this was underlined by my rt hon Friend the Prime Minister and by the Irish Prime Minister, Mr Haughey, when they met in Dublin on 4 December.]

6. On the basis of those exchanges I can now tell the House that agreement has been reached on a new basis for fresh talks. To allow an opportunity for those talks to take place the two Governments have agreed that after the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference [, on January,] there will be no further meeting of the Conference until after the UK General Election has been called. [This does not effect the agreement between my rt hon Friend the Prime Minister and the Irish Prime Minister that they would meet twice a year to review the totality of relationships involving the two countries and, subject to the date of the election, they intend to meet in [early May].] The participating parties have agreed that if the talks are not concluded before the election is called and unless there is a change of administration they will resume the talks after polling day.

7. As the Conference will not be meeting between [January] and the calling of the election, the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement.

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8. It remains common ground between all the parties that hope of achieving a new and more broadly based agreement rests on finding a way to give adequate expression to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned. Talks will accordingly take place in three strands corresponding respectively to the three main relationships.

9. It is accepted by all those involved that, to make full use of the time available before the election [and - if possible - to achieve within that period an overall agreement acceptable to all], it will be necessary to have launched the North/South strand of discussion within weeks of [January].

10. The first step is to launch fresh talks between the Northern Ireland parties, under my chairmanship. Building on experience gained in the previous talks, these will involve smaller delegations than previously and be less formal [with progress in the substantive exchanges being guided by an all-party Business Committee]. It is also envisaged that in [parallel with] the initial stages of these talks I should have bilateral discussions with each party to establish their positions on substantive issues. [Some of] these meetings and [of] the initial multi-lateral exchanges will take place in London. [The intention is to move as rapidly as possible into an agreed programme of regular multi-lateral exchanges.]

11. It has been agreed by all the participants that before long, when, after consultation, I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose formally that the North/South strand should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the North/South strand of discussion will be underway within weeks of [January]. All meetings of the North/South Strand will have an independent Chairman [whose identity will be announced by the two Governments after consultation with other participating parties]. The opening plenary meeting of this strand of the talks will be held in London, with the bulk of substantive changes taking place at Parliament Buildings,

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Stormont. (It will of course also be open to the Chairman and the participants to hold non-plenary meetings wherever suits their mutual convenience.) Subject to the calling of the election, a plenary meeting of the North/South strand will be held in Dublin [towards the end of May at the latest]. Procedural guidelines for the conduct of this strand of the Talks will be agreed between all the participants. All the Northern Ireland parties will participate actively and directly in the North/South Strand of discussions. The Unionist parties have made it clear that they wish their participation in [those talks/this strand of discussion] to be formally associated with my presence and that they will regard themselves as members of the United Kingdom team.

12. The East/West strand of discussion, between the two Governments [and concerned with relationships between the two Governments] will commence after the plenary meeting in Dublin to which I have just referred. The other participating parties will be free to discuss Strand 3 issues with the Governments [at any stage] and will be kept in touch with progress in this strand of the talks. The two Governments will meet other participating parties at their request for further discussion of strand 3 issues while this strand is taking place and the outcome of this strand will be considered by all the participants alongside the outcome of the other two strands on the general understanding that nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the Talks as a whole. This may require the strand 1 formation or the strand 2 formation, as appropriate, to be reconvened to consider issues further in the light of later developments.

13. Some arrangements will be needed for liaison between the different strands of these complex discussions.

14. In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, it will be open to each of the parties, at any stage, to raise any aspect of these

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relationships, including constitutional issues, or any other matter which it considers relevant. All concerned have assured me that they will participate in good faith and will make every effort to achieve progress.

15. Given all the sensitivities and difficulties, all the parties have assured me of their determination to maintain confidentiality throughout the talks process. However, they also agree that the outcome will need to be acceptable to the people.

Thank you for your letter of 12 November about the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I have noted the points you made. You are aware of the Government's own position which is firmly on the public record.

You explained very clearly your desire to see the Agreement replaced. In that context I would remind you that the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland made it clear earlier this year that they would be prepared to consider a new and more broadly based agreement or structure if such an agreement could be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all the parties concerned. That undertaking formed part of the basis for the recent talks announced by Mr Brooke on 26 March. It also remains on the table for the fresh talks which Mr Brooke is endeavouring to get under way and about which he is consulting you, other Northern Ireland party leaders and the Irish Government.

Your sincerely,
John H.

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The Reverend Ian Paisley, M.S.P., M.P.