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FROM: D A LAVERY  
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT  
19 August 1997

cc Mr Watkins - O  
Mr Carson o/r - O  
Mr Hill o/r - O  
Mr Maccabe - O  
Mr Whysall - O  
Mr Johnston - O

Ms Mapstone - O  
IPL

Murray <sup>hds</sup>  
19/8.  
Mr Barnes  
- background phs.  
now attached.  
1/8.

## CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES FOR UNIONISTS: PART II

This is to let you have a short note on the confidence-building potential of the Forum, as requested in Mr Watkins' minute of 12 August and Mr Hill's submission of 31 July. If you need anything further, please let me know.

[Signed DAL]

D A LAVERY  
SC 28196

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**2. THE FORUM**

**Proposal**

- (a) more co-operation with the Forum by NIO;
- (b) facilitation of the Forum's restructuring with more committee work and Forum Plenaries limited to receipt of committee reports and general debates, say, once a month.

**Assessment**

- 1. This suggestion illustrates some degree of 'double-think' on the part of the UUP. On the one hand, wishing to have the Forum taken seriously by the NIO and Ministers. On the other hand, wishing to scale-down the plenary meetings of the Forum - presumably in order to reduce the opportunities for the DUP and UKUP to bring pressure to bear on the UUP leadership.
- 2. On **co-operation with the Forum** the Secretary of State recently confirmed to Baroness Denton that Ministers will "wherever appropriate, wish to continue the established practice of meeting delegations from the Forum to receive reports and to take note of concerns expressed by the Forum on matters within its remit" [Secretary of State's letter to Baroness Denton dated 4 July 1997].
- 3. Central Secretariat guidance has been given to all Northern Ireland Departments on contact with the Forum. The guidance emphasises that Ministers and their Departments are accountable only to Parliament, and are not directly or indirectly accountable to the Forum. The Secretary of State has confirmed that, subject to this qualification, Ministers and officials will continue to co-operate with the Forum to the degree that is appropriate in each case.
- 4. On **restructuring the Forum**, the UUP proposal is that instead of meeting weekly, the Forum might hold plenaries once a month and place greater emphasis on committee

work. A similar suggestion was made by the Forum Chairman, Mr Gorman (a UUP member), at his recent meeting with the Secretary of State.

5. The thinking behind this proposal is unclear. It may be that weekly plenary meetings are proving to be a burden on the parties attending the Forum. The UUP proposal would allow greater emphasis to be placed on the work of the Forum's committees (it has Standing Committees on: Agriculture and Fisheries, the Economy, Education, Electoral Reform, and Health Services). However, the more likely explanation is that weekly plenaries provide the DUP and UKUP with an opportunity to score points at the UUP's expense.
6. Any change in the conduct of Forum business is a matter for the Forum (and its Business Committee).

### **Summary**

7. NIO Ministers and officials will continue to co-operate with the Forum to the extent that is possible and appropriate on a case-by-case basis. Changes in the pattern of Forum business are a matter for the Forum itself.

**19 August 1997**