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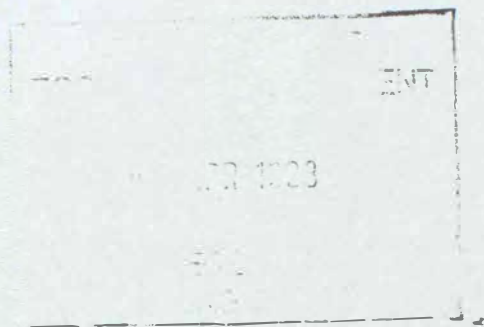
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mc No

From: Tony McCusker

To: PS/Secretary of State

Date: 2 April 1998

cc PS/Mr Murphy  
PS/Mr Ingram  
PS/PUS  
PS/Mr Semple  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Steele  
Mr Jeffrey  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Kelly  
Mr Hill  
Mr Ferguson  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Crawford  
Ms Quinn



\*cc. Mr Gibson  
Mr ~~Grant~~  
Mr Brent

Return

Mr Mccusker

(PA)

#### BRIEFINGS: G7 (OR MAYBE G6½)

1. Tom Kelly, Robert Crawford and I met Members of G7 last night to provide briefing on the Talks and the programme through to a Referendum, election and eventual implementation of a devolved administration.
2. Following a broad rehearsal of where we were in the Talks there followed a wide ranging discussion about their hopes for a successful outcome to the Talks and a successful implementation of a devolved administration. The highlights of the discussion were:
  - an agreed view that the current Talks process represented the best opportunity there had ever been for a successful political settlement, though the level of public support is hard to tell;
  - while recognising the political sensitivities involved in Strands 1 and 2, they believed that an Agreement with sufficient consensus would be broadly welcomed by the population;

- there was a general preference for a cabinet/executive, a committee system was thought to be unworkable. George Quigley was emphatic on this;
  - concern was expressed about a possible hiatus between an election and the implementation of devolution. Unless there was a work programme capable of demonstrating the benefits flowing from devolution and providing opportunities for consensus politics, then any unfinished business from the Agreement would easily unravel under pressure from those opposed to any settlement;
  - they were concerned that the Parties had simply not addressed either the question of running an administration or socio economic policy (as demonstrated graphically by the presentations from the Party Leaders to the Chamber of Commerce lunches). They offered the view that the private sector was willing and able to lend support and advice to a new administration;
  - there were some naive assumptions about possible peace dividends both in terms of reduced security costs and Treasury packages and in any future post agreement briefing we could usefully add DED and DFP to the briefing team to ensure that the business sector does not run away with a notion that times of plenty are ahead;
  - in terms of their role during a Referendum period, we did not overleg the situation in the light of the leak of Tom Kelly's document, but indicated that if there was an Agreement, which by definition would have sufficient consensus, then the hope was that influential bodies would support the Political Parties trying to achieve a settlement.
3. All in all a good meeting with only a very slight tension at the beginning about the emergence of the leaked document. They were clearly pleased to have been given a full briefing and any limited damage caused by the recent leak has I think been left well behind.



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