

FROM: CLARE SALTERS  
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16 September 1997

cc: as attached

**NOTE FOR THE RECORD**

**TALKS: 15 SEPTEMBER 1997**

Internal Pre-brief

1. The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy met officials at 9.35 am to discuss the day's handling. It was understood that the Prime Minister had struck some sort of deal with Mr Trimble whereby the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach would issue a statement that morning and Trimble would later indicate that he would be at the talks the following day. However, the format of how this deal would work out in practice was unclear and there was also concern that the Prime Minister had not been explicit with Trimble regarding Senator Mitchell's role as de facto Chairman of Strand 2. It was agreed that, irrespective of whether or not the DUP accusation against Sinn Fein was formally tabled at the Plenary, it would be important for the Governments to have a chance to question Sinn Fein on the IRA interview which appeared in An Phoblacht the previous week.

Meeting with the Irish

2. At 9.45 am we were joined by the Irish. **Mr Burke** was adamant that if Trimble had done a deal it would be important to hold him to that. He wanted to hear Trimble say both that he was content with the wording of the procedural motion and that he would vote for it in the Plenary meeting the following day. **Mr Burke** added that if there was no statement he hoped that the Prime Minister would be in touch with Mr Trimble to make clear his displeasure.

3. The rest of the discussion focused on the choreography for the day ahead, in particular the handling of the Plenary session. It was agreed

that it would be best to deal with the accusation against Sinn Fein at the initial Plenary session and then to seek an adjournment before tabling the procedural motion later that afternoon.

#### Meeting with the Chairmen

4. **The Chairmen** arrived at 10.30 am and discussion focused on how to manager the DUP accusation against Sinn Fein. **Senator Mitchell** indicated that he intended to announce the accusation to the Plenary but not to get into debate on the subject. He suggested that the Governments should invite any comments from participants with a view to taking appropriate action in due course. In terms of taking forward the procedural motion **the Minister** asked whether the UUP could exercise their vote by proxy through the Chair. **Senator Mitchell** asked the Governments to prepare a ruling for him to make this possible, though he stressed that he didn't want to create a process that could in future be used to stall the process.

#### Meeting with the UUP

5. At 12.00 noon the Minister met with the UUP at their headquarters in Glengall Street. David Hill's note of 15 September records the discussion.

#### Meeting with Sinn Fein

6. The Secretary of State met a Sinn Fein delegation at 1.40 pm. She began by explaining that, while she was not sure what the day would hold, her intention was to go ahead this afternoon starting with a ritual chastisement of Sinn Fein and then proceeding to table the procedural motion. **Mr Adams** commented that he felt that some of the criticism from the British Government following the publication of the IRA interview in An Phoblacht was a bit over the top and he got in his usual jibe about it being inappropriate for British Ministers to talk about violence while his constituents were getting harassed on a daily basis by the security forces. However, he agreed that it was important

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to move on and tackle the procedural motion as a means of getting the Unionists involved.

7. **Mr Thomas** explained that we would plan to table the motion and then ask for an adjournment to allow participants to consider it more fully. **Sinn Fein** expressed some concern at the prospect of an overnight adjournment being called for but the **Secretary of State** reassured them that the length of the adjournment would be a matter for the participants. **Mr McGuinness** was concerned that the UUP appeared to be getting preferential treatment and that they alone had seen the procedural motion. **The Secretary of State** explained that the Governments were doing their best to tie the UUP into the process and had felt it was appropriate in the circumstances to consult with the UUP. However, she gave an assurance that she would circulate procedural motion to the other parties as soon as possible.

Meeting with the Irish #2

8. We met the Irish Government again at 1.55 pm. **Mr Murphy** reported back on his meeting with the UUP: the UUP were not content to agree the procedural motion as currently worded although they were broadly content with the wording on decommissioning; they had major problems in relation to the agenda (they wanted a more detailed structure for this) and the link to the Business Committee; they were also concerned at the reference to further Plenary meetings being called as required; and were still not content on the issue of chairmanships. It became apparent that our (and the Irish) understanding of the deal was quite different to Mr Trimble's and it was agreed that we would need to seek clarification from the Prime Minister's office on this. **Mr Burke** noted that the Irish Government had agreed the joint statement on the basis that Trimble would come into the talks and he was therefore concerned that this bargain appeared to have been reneged on.

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Plenary

9. The Plenary commenced at 2.15 pm with the Alliance Party, Labour, the NIWC, Sinn Fein and the SDLP present. After the minutes of 23 July and 28 July had been approved, **Senator Mitchell** raised the subject of Dr Paisley's letter of 12 September and in particular the status which this letter had within the process given the DUP's current non-participation in the talks process. All delegations present felt that the letter should have no standing because of the DUP's non-participation. Noting this, **the Secretary of State** suggested that it might be appropriate for the letter simply to be noted by the Chairman and for participants to agree to do nothing in relation to it. If the DUP rejoined the process at a later date they could then resurrect their complaint. **The Senator** agreed that business should move on but indicated that, if delegations had any further comments, he would be happy to receive them.

10. **The Secretary of State** then challenged Sinn Fein on the recent IRA interview in An Phoblacht. She described this as worrying and said that it was important for Sinn Fein to address the questions that arose from it. Having stressed the importance of the Mitchell principles and Sinn Fein's commitment to them, she asked how Sinn Fein could expect people to have confidence in their commitment when it was followed almost immediately by comments by the IRA to the effect that they had problems with a number of the Mitchell principles. **Mr Adams** commented in response that Sinn Fein and the IRA were not inextricably linked, that Sinn Fein was participating in the talks because of their electoral mandate and that they agreed it was important to build confidence, particularly through dialogue. In response to a specific question from Mr Murphy, **Mr Adams** agreed that the timing of the article was "unfortunate". **Mr Burke** also criticised both the content and the timing of the article as unhelpful.

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11. **Mr Mallon** asked whether Sinn Fein shared the Taoiseach's view expressed in his statement to the Dail on 11 September that the Mitchell principles should be honoured by the whole of the Republican Movement. **Lord Alderdice** asked whether, if An Phoblacht was a Sinn Fein publication, this meant that Sinn Fein had approved the timing of printing the article. He also asked whether, if there was no link between Sinn Fein and the IRA, this meant that whatever was agreed in the talks with Sinn Fein could not necessarily be assumed to be acceptable to the IRA. If this was the case he suggested that the current process was not a peace process but rather a political process. **Ms McWilliams** asked whether Sinn Fein genuinely wanted all parties round the table or whether the An Phoblacht interview had been intended to dissuade the unionists from rejoining the process. In response, **Mr Adams** stated that Sinn Fein did want all parties round the table and that included the unionists. As to the timing of the publication of the IRA interview he said this was a matter for the editor of An Phoblacht; however, if he had been asked, he would have recommended that it be deferred. He evaded Lord Alderdice's other question and indeed that of Mr Mallon.

12. There followed a rather torturous discussion between Mr Adams and Lord Alderdice which culminated in **Mr McGuinness** stating that Sinn Fein could not guarantee that the IRA would support whatever was agreed in the Talks. **Senator Mitchell** commented that he and his fellow Chairmen took the principles of democracy and non-violence seriously and regarded them as essential: they represented not just the views of the Independent Chairmen but also the aspirations of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland. In a way in which he and his colleagues could not have foreseen when they drew up the principles, they had now become a basis for the talks process itself. If the principles failed, then the talks would also fail, and he commented that he believed history would judge harshly anyone who allowed this to happen. He appealed to the delegates for the sake of the people they represented, not to let the Talks fail and,

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Therefore, to honour the principles. He described the current opportunity as unique and encouraged participants to think about how the process could be made to work. **The Senator** then explained that the Governments had requested an adjournment in order to make further progress on their procedural motion and Plenary adjourned, at the call of the Chair, at 4.00 pm.

Meeting with the Irish #3

13. We met again, with the Irish Government at 4.00 pm. **The Secretary of State** and **Mr Burke** both confirmed that they were happy with the revised procedural motion and agreed that the UUP had to be pushed really hard to agree it, with the current revision presented as the bottom line. It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Prime Minister, as well as Mr Murphy, to speak to Mr Trimble during the course of the afternoon.

Meeting with the Chairmen #2

14. We were joined by Senator Mitchell at 4.20 pm. **The Secretary of State** updated him on progress; **Mr Burke** reported that he had spoken to the Taoiseach whose understanding was that Mr Trimble could cope with the procedural motion if minor amendments were made to it (this had now been done). Before leaving to meet with the UUP, **Senator Mitchell** suggested that the Governments might want to consider not letting the procedural motion go public that evening, as this might provide ammunition for the DUP and UKUP to attack the UUP and thus discourage them from further participation.

Internal Meeting

15. **Mr Murphy** spoke to Mr Trimble on the telephone just before 6.00 pm. **Mr Trimble** raised again the issues he had discussed earlier in the day; there did not appear to be anything new, but it was clear that the UUP were still not happy with the procedural

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otion and intended to work on their own suggested wording overnight. We agreed that it would be helpful to issue further advice to No.10 that evening indicating that the other side of the deal would fall apart if no commitment was seen from Mr Trimble in the very near future. **The Secretary of State** indicated that she would intend to follow this up with a telephone call to the Prime Minister, later that evening. There was at this point real concern that Senator Mitchell would withdraw from the process, feeling that the Prime Minister had dishonoured his personal commitment to Mitchell to make explicit to the UUP that Senator Mitchell would be the de facto Chairman of Strand Two.

Meeting with the Chairmen #3

16. We were joined by the Chairmen and the Irish at 6.55 pm. **The Senator** reported back on his meeting with the UUP; his discussion had been along similar lines to the one that the Minister had had with Trimble. **Senator Mitchell** also indicated, as a result of his meeting with PUP and UDP, that the Loyalist Parties were feeling "rather unloved". The UDP in particular were keen to see a full discussion on consent within the Plenary.

17. As to how to proceed, it was agreed that because of the need to achieve sufficient consensus there was very little option other than to defer tabling the procedural motion until the following day. In the meantime, the two Governments agreed to brief the other parties on progress to date, the Irish Government undertaking to brief the SDLP and Sinn Fein whilst the Secretary of State and the Minister agreed to see the NIWC, Labour and the Alliance Party.

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Briefing the Alliance, the NIWC and Labour

18. Between 7.25 pm and 7.45 pm the Minister and the Secretary of State briefed the other parties as agreed. **The Minister** met with the Alliance Party who were broadly content with, or at least understanding of, progress to date. **Lord Alderdice** commented that he felt it was a negative step for Sinn Fein to have brought Joe Cahill to the negotiations, someone who had been sentenced to hang in the Republic of Ireland because of his terrorist background. The Secretary of State met with both the NIWC and the Labour Coalition, both of whom were content with what was proposed.

Plenary #2

19. Plenary resumed at 8.05 pm. **Senator Mitchell** stated that when he had adjourned the meeting, he had indicated that there would be consultations between the Governments and other parties, in the hope of preparing a procedural motion, which would cover full range of topics remaining on the agenda for the opening Plenary, that is: decommissioning; comprehensive agenda; the beginning of a series of meetings by the Business Committee to establish the timetable and procedures for the three strands; and the launch of the three strands. The discussions had been very full and some questions had arisen. The Governments were, therefore, not in a position to table the procedural motion that evening, but intended to do so the following day. He, therefore, suggested an adjournment. Both Governments apologised for the delay, and indicated their appreciation of the frustration that this would cause for the other participants.

20. **Mr Mallon** commented that he was surprised that the UUP appeared to want to re-negotiate format and agenda for the substantive Talks, as he believed these had already been agreed. He commented further that he felt that if negotiations were to continue to occur

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elsewhere, the whole talks process would be devalued. **Mr Adams** was not happy at the prospect of an adjournment until the following day, and also raised the issue of how this failure to move into substantive negotiations on the appointed day would be presented to the Media. The other Parties expressed frustration but acknowledged the importance of fully inclusive talks, and, therefore, agreed that an adjournment was appropriate.

21. On the subject of how the postponement would be portrayed, both Governments indicated that they would say that they believed that significant, albeit slow, progress had been made towards substantive negotiations and that while there were still some points to be resolved overnight in order to achieve inclusive negotiations and the Governments were committed to achieving this. **Senator Mitchell** adjourned the Plenary at 8.55 pm until 2.00 pm, 16 September.

(Signed)

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