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**FROM: F S WOODS
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PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O

WEEKLY INFORMATION BULLETIN: 25 August - 29 August 1997

Prospects for the week

Major media attention will focus this coming week on the anticipated decision by the Secretary of State on the validity of the IRA ceasefire and the entry of Sinn Fein into the Talks process. There is already speculation that the UUP may decline to sit down with Sinn Fein, but seek another way to remain in the process.

Consideration is being given to the handling of media presentation of any announcement.

Meanwhile officials are preparing for the restart of the Talks on 9 September, which substantive negotiations planned to get under way on 15 September.

Preparation is being made for an Adare-type meeting in Belfast, possibly on Tuesday. Issues to be considered will include the IRA ceasefire and the setting up of the International Commission on Decommissioning. While officials are currently considering membership, our declared intention is to have the Commission up and running by 15 September and the meeting may conclude with media coverage of the signing of a formal agreement.

There will continue to be interest in the Ulster Unionist Party's high profile consultation programme with the community, including the Roman Catholic hierarchy, about whether they should sit down with Sinn Fein..

De-escalatory measures by Government and security forces are still on the media agenda and care will be needed to portray a balanced approach. There was a mixed reaction to the decision to downgrade the security status of Republican prisoners in English jails with the main media headlines being 'Soft Jails for Provos'. Unionists have also warned this week about a soft approach to IRA/Sinn Fein, highlighted by a hardhitting personal attack on the Secretary of State by Ken Maginnis in a Belfast Telegraph article.

Following the Royal Black Institution decision not to march down the Ormeau Road, Sunday's annual parade to Church in Belfast should proceed without incident. Looking slightly further

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ahead, there is still some concern about the RBP parade planned for Newry on Sunday 31 August.

Despite the continuation of the holiday season and the Bank holiday weekend, there is a busy schedule for Ministers and Departments.

The good news on the jobs front, with a major British Telecom announcement (£9.1m investment and 757 jobs for Belfast) planned for Tuesday, gives the week a bright start. This will be followed on Wednesday by a *visit to Community Service Volunteer programmes to review their operations in Northern Ireland. This will include a visit to the offices in Waring Street, Belfast, of the Young Help Trust. The aim of the programme is to give volunteering opportunities to young people to work face-to-face with people in need.

Agriculture is having some problem stories. The seizure by French Customs of a consignment of beef from the ROI and follow up arrests by the German authorities at customer delivery locations, has started to appear in national newspapers. If investigations establish the source of the beef as coming from the United Kingdom, the scene looks set for a major row with EU partners in what will be viewed as a breach of the beef export ban.

The discovery of Newcastle Disease in game birds on an estate in Co Antrim may lead to speculation about possible spread of the disease to commercial producers, and DANI is attempting to keep the story in perspective.

The health side is being led this coming week by the midwifery development at Altnagelvin Hospital to be announced on *Tuesday.

On Wednesday there will be *private visits to two Social Security Offices to help boost morale following last week's attacks on Agency staff.

Wednesday will also see another series of *meetings with Councils to discuss a wide variety of health issues and this will attract widespread local media coverage.

On Thursday a team from a constituency newspaper, the Milngavie and Bearsden Herald, will shadow the day's business, including visits to Antrim and Whiteabbey Hospitals. This promises useful coverage of the normality of day to day life in Northern Ireland.

The recent GB announcement about lengthening waiting lists on the mainland will see the theme raised in Northern Ireland terms and this is likely to be followed up by local Health Correspondents well into the coming week.

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Opportunities this Week

Two doorstep opportunities will come on *Tuesday with involvement in two outside visits and announcements. In the morning there is the major British Telecom announcement; The second will be a visit to Londonderry to announce a midwifery development at Altnagelvin Hospital.

These doorsteps offer a useful opportunity for some pre-conditioning of attitudes prior to the ceasefire announcement later in the week, particularly as it links with the peace/economic benefit dimension. The public signing of the agreement on decommissioning on Tuesday will also be useful in this respect.

On *Wednesday there will be a national BBC Breakfast News Extra (television) phone-in; and there are also plans for a political interview with the Belfast Telegraph London Correspondent. On all occasions there is likely to be pressure for an early indication of the intentions of the Secretary of State re the restored IRA ceasefire. There are also a number of other media bids, locally, nationally and internationally, a briefing is planned for US correspondents in London.

KEY THEMES

Political

The Government remains determined that substantive negotiations will take place from 15 September. The defeat of the decommissioning proposals has led to slower progress than we would have wished, but we will not allow it to deflect us from our determined course.

It remains our intention to have detailed arrangements in place on a full operational basis including the appointment of the Decommissioning Commission, by the start of substantive negotiations. We are working closely with the Irish Government and we hope to make an announcement within a few days.

We are looking forward to resumption of the talks process in Plenary on 9th September and ultimately to wholehearted commitment and participation by all of the parties to constructive political discussion.

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The Government's firm intention is to ensure that the vital principles of democracy underpin developments towards a long-term political settlement. Lasting stability must grow out of a broad consensus and the clearly articulated desire for disparate groupings to work together in the common interest. Consent has always been, and remains, the key issue in any proposals for change.

The views of political leaders and their constituents are welcomed by the Government, which is committed to a more open and accountable approach. New institutions can and will be developed only in ways which take full account of the interests and aspirations of both communities.

We note that Mr Adams has been granted a Visa for a visit to the USA. It is to be hoped that he will take the opportunity to further the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland and to increase the confidence of everyone that peace is here to stay.

The British and Irish governments agree that the way forward must be on the basis of implementing all aspects of the Mitchell report. These proposals offer a fair and balanced approach.

Sinn Fein and the Ceasefire

It remains our intention to make a decision on the IRA ceasefire, after looking at all the relevant information and circumstances, some six weeks following its restoration.

If the Secretary of State is satisfied that Sinn Fein meet the requirements specified in the legislation, she will invite them to nominate a team to participate in the Talks.

No decision has yet been taken and while it may be imminent, it is important that nothing be said in advance which might be interpreted as prejudgement of the issue.

Sinn Fein have been told that the talks will be taken forward on 15 September on the basis of adherence to the Mitchell principles and they know what is required for their participation.

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Prisons and Prisoners

All prisoners in Northern Ireland (except life sentence) are currently eligible for automatic release having served half their sentence and we are not considering earlier release at present. However, as the ceasefires hold other options become possible. Any change in the rules on remission would require legislation. Changes in the security classification of prisoners in England is an operational matter for the GB Prison Service.

The Secretary of State has condemned prison disturbances and attacks on the homes of prison staff. The Prison Service is continuing with its examination of working practices and other issues. UVF prisoners, due to be relocated soon, have been kept informed.

Security

We condemn without reservation any use of violence in whatever form, and will maintain our guard at all times.

Nevertheless the police and army have been able to take a number of measures following the ceasefire, including reductions in security force patrols and military support to the RUC, and this process will continue.

We will monitor the situation very closely and will not move more quickly than events on the ground allow. All of the steps taken can be quickly reversed if necessary.

Parades

We continue to believe that the way to reduce the tensions and difficulties surrounding parades is through dialogue and negotiation leading to accommodation at local level. This is not a question of denying anyone's rights but of reaching an acceptable balance. Everyone with any influence should use it for reconciliation, not confrontation.

Despite the occasional activities of hooligan elements, events this summer have shown what is possible; we commend the efforts of all those who are working for a peaceful resolution.

The Government, the RUC and Parades Commission will do everything they can to prevent disorder and conflict and uphold the rule of law

If agreement cannot be reached, any protests must be peaceful and give no opportunity for extremists to exploit.

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We will set up new and better arrangements for dealing with these disputes in future years. Our new approach will be based on the North Report. New legislation later this year will provide the basis. Our proposals will take account of the experience of this marching season and the views of all those involved.

Rights and Confidence Building

This Government is committed to the fundamental principles of fairness and justice; there will be no second-class citizens. We are determined to see full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights and freedom from discrimination for everyone. We are committed to building a society where the different identities are treated equally and enjoy mutual respect.

We will seek wherever possible initiatives to build confidence throughout the community and have announced a programme of specific measures including:- incorporation of ECHR; combating discrimination in labour market; implementation of North Report. We will also seek to increase confidence in the RUC through reform of structures and complaints system

These measures will threaten no-one and reflect sound principles which should underpin any fair minded society.

Economy

Major new investment projects, together with other signs, including a fall in unemployment, demonstrate the potential of the Northern Ireland economy and the benefits which could flow for all of the people in the Province if the ceasefires are sustained.

(Signed)

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