

Tuesday 7 April 1998

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MR SEMPLE

POLITICAL UPDATE - GRIM OUTLOOK (BRIDGES TOO FAR?)

You may wish to advise Panel colleagues of the following.

Things have taken a serious turn for the worse with regards to the political process.

At approximately 2.30 pm today the Unionists issued text of a letter to the Irish Government and to the Prime Minister which vehemently rejected Senator Mitchell's synthesis paper. The Unionists squarely lay blame for this at the foot of the Irish.

Whilst not talking in terms of a walk-out, they have signalled that 'radical changes' are required.

Tony Blair is flying in at 4.40 pm and going straight to Hillsborough (he will be met by David Watkins). It is planned that he will have a meeting at 5.30 pm with David Trimble.

The PM will then stay at Hillsborough and await the arrival of the Taoiseach (tomorrow?).

To top all of this, the Alliance Party have responded equally vehemently to the document. They believe they could not sell it to their constituency!

All this of course suits the SDLP and Sinn Fein particularly well. It deflects away from their protestations.

We are probably likely to see SDLP/Sinn Fein push on regardless for non-institutional issues (eg policing, criminal justice etc) arguing that such issues should not await the resolution of institutional issues.

The way forward is completely unknown until the outcome of David Trimble's meeting with Tony Blair at 5.30 pm.



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PS: this incidentally means that David Watkins will be unable to attend the Talks pre-brief at 4.30 in the VCR - do you now wish to attend this?