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cc Secretary
Mr Hamilton
Mr Ross, IDB
Mr MacCann
Mr Templeton

24 January 1995

To: Mr Gibson

From: R Gamble

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25/1/95

MEETING WITH CHARLES MEISSNER, US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

1. Mike Maxwell, Don Alexander and I today met Charles Meissner of the US Department of Commerce, who was accompanied by Cantwell Walsh from the London Embassy and one other. Two subjects were discussed: the visit of Senator George Mitchell in February and the Ireland Trade and Investment Conference in Washington in May.

Visit of Senator Mitchell

2. The dates are 14 February to 19 February. Senator Mitchell is therefore not attending Sir G Quigley's Peace Dividend Seminar. It is envisaged that Senator Mitchell will meet the Prime Minister in London and the Secretary of State and Baroness Denton (separately) in Northern Ireland. He will split his visit more or less half and half between Northern Ireland and the Republic. It is a fact finding, orientation visit and Senator Mitchell will be travelling around Northern Ireland and meeting as many "interests" as possible. The programme will have to be fleshed out over the next week or so.

Washington Conference

3. Meissner spoke first about preparing a conference document which would contain (a) the background on the Northern Ireland economy (and that of the ROI) and its connection into the wider economies



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of the UK and the EU; (b) what the US administration can do in terms of investment, trade, technology, tourism etc; (c) economic development programmes for sub-areas within Northern Ireland (and the ROI) - ie District Council development strategies. We expressed some doubt about the feasibility of (c) - I would be grateful for advice from Mr Hamilton about this. The US side will be looking for information from us to help compile the background section. I agreed that we could provide statistical and other information, though I said that we did not have the resources to generate new text for this exercise. Meissner said that it was only background information, not text, that was required. He said he would be asking the employers organisations and the Trade Unions to provide some material for inclusion in the document (possibly their views of the economic needs of NI).

- 4. The US side wants the format of the conference to mirror that in Cleveland earlier this month. Proceedings are likely to start with a dinner on Wednesday 17 May followed by two days of the conference proper on 18 and 19 May. The mornings of the two days would be given over to plenary sessions and the afternoons to workshops organised on a sectoral basis. The US side are not anticipating that Mr Major or Mr Bruton will attend and indeed had not thought that any Government Ministers, other than US ones, would speak in the plenary sessions. There was a suggestion that UK and ROI Ministers could speak at the workshop sessions, though Meissner gave the impression of being not keen even on that. He is anxious to avoid what he described as "divisive" issues dominating the conference; he shuddered slightly at the thought of a fair employment session for that reason, though he did not rule it out as a workshop subject. Meissner wants the Trade Unions to have a role at the conference, though he seems unclear at present about what this should be.*



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5. *Business attendance at the conference is expected to be around 1,000 (300 from NI and ROI, 700 US). The intention is that "ROI" in this context will mean the six border counties, but Meissner seemed to think there might be difficulty in holding to that. On top of the business participants there will be the political/community participants - possibly another 200 or 300 all told. There would be conference fee of \$650, which would be halved for small firms and waived for political and community participants. Airfares, subsistence etc would be for participants themselves to cover, though IFI have apparently said they will consider helping some of the more needy.*

6. *The US side are looking to NI and ROI officials to provide lists of those they think should receive invitations to the conference, including firms from the US, NI and ROI, and politicians and community groups. From the island of Ireland, they want firms, small or large, which have a real interest in business with the US - those looking for joint ventures or partners or seeking to export to the US etc. They expect to issue over 2,000 invitations in the US in order to get 500 to 700 acceptances. They are aiming at CEO level. If invitations are to issue six weeks before the conference, they will need our list in a month's time. IDB will no doubt have been giving this some thought already. (Mr Ross)*

7. *As mentioned, the working groups are to be organised on a sectoral basis. The US side would like our views on what the sectors should be. They see tourism very definitely as one of these. Property development (especially perhaps warehousing for distribution to the European Market) could be one also, if we want it to be. Again IDB will want to consider what sectors should be represented. (Mr Ross)*

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