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*W. B. ...*

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- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mrs Brown - B
- Mr Currie - B
- Mr T Smyth - B
- Mr Caine - B
- HMA Dublin - B
- Mr Lamont, RID - B
- Mr Beeton - B
- Mr Pope - B

Mr Leach - B

LXD: PAINFUL PROGRESS TO THE STARTING LINE

Summary

The PUP have indicated that they will attend Thursday's initial meeting in accordance with the invitation issued to them at the end of last week. The UDP have gone through a period of soul-searching, but seem at last to have reached a view that their representatives can also attend as invited. In connection with the UDP, queries have been raised about the size of their delegation, and the issue of them having separate discussions with the Government. (After the meeting of the LXD team this afternoon, some of the information below is no longer new, but it may be of interest to other colleagues.)

C O N F I D E N T I A L

15100/LO

C O N F I D E N T I A L

PUP

2. I spoke on Friday evening (9th inst) and again on Monday to Hugh Smyth. He confirmed that the PUP would be accepting the invitation to an opening meeting on the 15 December. David Ervine today put forward the names of himself, Billy Hutchinson, Lindsay Robb, Jackie Mahood, and Billy Smith. (He was apologetic about the size of the delegation, but had just learned of the UDP manoeuvrings - see below - and felt they had to respond in kind.)

UDP

3. After initially accepting the letter of invitation with almost indecent haste - Joe English confirmed acceptance within an hour of the letter issuing on the afternoon of December 8th - the UDP have proceeded to make life difficult for themselves. On Friday (9th) McMichael publicly announced that the presence of Sean McManus in the Sinn Fein delegation to meet Government was a major stumbling block to the UDP joining the exploratory talks process. In the course of a subsequent telephone conversation, English seemed rather embarrassed about this but confirmed to me that it was a serious matter, and that McMichael might want to speak to someone on the Government side about it. On Saturday, McMichael sent a fax through to the office seeking a meeting with me to discuss this. This was not transmitted to me, and no follow-up took place over the weekend. When I spoke to McMichael on Monday morning to acknowledge his fax of the weekend, the idea of a meeting to discuss McManus seemed not to be a major worry: it would "make things easier" for McMichael if the Government's position on McManus was known, but it was not identified as a crucial issue. Of equal concern now was the fact that UDP might want to consider sending in a separate, five-man delegation, to carry on exploratory talks independent of the PUP.

4. By Monday afternoon, that position had changed once more. English passed on the good news that the UDP would certainly be at the talks on Thursday: the idea of the meeting to discuss McManus

C O N F I D E N T I A L

15100/LO

C O N F I D E N T I A L

had completely disappeared. In its absence, however, the idea of having separate meetings had assumed new prominence. According to English it was now "imperative" for the UDP delegation to have the scope to arrive separately, talk separately, and leave separately. During an exchange, in which McMichael and two or three members of the UDP Executive also participated, I argued that we felt it was important to talk to both Loyalists groups together. The fact that the both groups had co-operated in bringing about the Loyalist ceasefire meant their continuing to act together would send a strong message of reassurance about the possibility of peace continuing: their acting separately - while we appreciated their wish to establish clearly demarcated party positions - might well send the contrary signals. I indicated that, within a broad framework of joint dialogue with the Government, there was plenty of scope to ensure that the position of the UDP was clearly differentiated (where necessary) from that of the PUP. Was this not a matter which could be discussed at Thursdays meeting?

5. After further discussions on both sides, we have agreed that the UDP delegation will arrive at Stormont 10.00am on Thursday morning. They are content to wait in a delegation room until 10.30am, before joining in a full meeting, under the agenda set out in the letter of invitation. They have asked for coffee and copy of the Prison Service Year Book (!) to pass the time.

Size of UDP delegation

6. Perhaps as a quid pro quo, the UDP are pressing hard for us to accept a five-man delegation - because Sinn Fein had five in their team - and have put forward the names of McMichael, English, White, Adams and Kirkham. They have been given no commitment on this, and have acknowledged the practical implications of meetings becoming bogged down with a large number of participants; but it is clearly a matter of some importance to them.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

15100/LO

C O N F I D E N T I A L

7. We need a line to take on this as a matter of urgency, although a final decision may depend on the decision taken on the issue of separate delegations for the UDP and PUP (see below.)

Separate Delegations?

8. The issue of separate discussions is also one upon which the UDP feels strongly. It was surfaced at the initial meeting they and the PUP attended with Chris Maccabe and I, and has been reverted to on numerous occasions since. For their part, the PUP are probably just as keen to establish their own position - [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
- but are more flexible on timing. Ervine has also opined that separate terms will probably be necessary at some stage. My impression is that the UDP will push hard for, and the PUP will not strongly resist, the idea of separate delegations to carry on the dialogue.

9. The issue is for discussion at Thursday's meeting, but the main lines of argument are probably fairly clear already. In favour of maintaining a joint approach is the fact that the PUP are the more capable politicians, and may play a useful role in stabilising the UDP. The discussions detailed above demonstrate graphically the difference between the PUP's focussed and business like approach, and the UDP's continual reappraisals of where the Party wants to go, and why. Separate negotiations with the two parties may create tensions and inconsistencies in the approach we develop to our overall objectives of bringing Loyalists into the political main stream, and of making progress on the decommissioning of Loyalist arms. There are resource implications too, and the possibility of the talks team endlessly re-cycling with the UDP arguments which have already been exhausted with the PUP.

10. But there are strong arguments, too, for not rejecting the UDP demands out of hand. At present, the first priority is to get them into exploratory dialogue in a responsible and positive frame of mind, and to avoid creating the impression that the Government

C O N F I D E N T I A L

15100/LO

C O N F I D E N T I A L

side is needlessly hung up on points of procedure. Their letter of invitation implies that the Government is prepared to be flexible on how the discussions are progressed, and we can legitimately be asked to demonstrate the fact. And in the longer term, it is questionable if we gain a great deal by trying to treat as a unit two parties which may have quite distinct agendas: the UDP may well be better equipped to sell to its supporters a line it has separately worked out with the Government, rather than one to which it has signed up only in the interests of maintaining an artificial unity.

Conclusion

11. The balance of argument seems to favour not offering the UDP separate negotiations at this stage; but not refusing them if the Party seems prepared to make it a deal-wrecking issue.

12. With regard to the size of the UDP delegation, a five-man team looks like posturing - but posturing is important (at least at this stage) to a party as politically immature as the UDP; and overall, it does not seem like an issue for confrontation. If the separate teams issue is conceded, a five-man UDP delegation becomes a more manageable proposition.

[Signed P Smyth]

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