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RECEIVED 24 DEC 1996

24 Dec 8 50 NC/61/12

CENT 520 INT/67/96

From: John McKervill
Political Affairs Division
18 December 1996

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
- PS/Malcolm Moss (DHSS,DOE&L) - B
- PS/Baroness Denton (DED,DANI&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr Beeton - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Hill (B&L) - B
- Mr Lavery - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Priestly -- B
- Ms Bharucha - B
- Ms Mapstone - B
- Mr Whysall (B&L) - B
- Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B
- Mr Dickinson, TAU - B
- Mr Lamont, RID FCO - B
- HMA Dublin
- Mr Jones, HO (via IPL) - B
- Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
- Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
- Mrs McNally (B&L) - B
- Mr Holmes, No 10 (via IPL) - B

1. to Mr [unclear]
 to Mr [unclear] *the [unclear]*
 20.4

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: 18 DECEMBER 1996

Summary

Talks adjourned for Christmas until 13 January 1997 when meetings among participants will recommence. Full plenary to convene to 27 January 1997.

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Detail

2. With no expectation that the decommissioning issue might be resolved before Christmas, minds focussed on adjourning the talks in the best possible light. A meeting between the two Government delegations and the Independent Chairmen at 10.30 considered a draft press statement and a draft speaking note which the Independent Chairman, Senator Mitchell might deploy at the following plenary meeting. His draft speaking note followed closely the draft which Mr Hill had provided to the Independent Chairmen the previous day, with one change of emphasis. This was that the Chairman intended that when the delegations returned on 13 January they should become involved in full and proper bilaterals rather than mirroring the arrangements which were in place during the Summer break in August. Attempts by the Irish in the form of David Donoghue, (to the increasing irritation of his colleague Mr O'hUiginn) to have the press statement give greater emphasis to the reconvening of the plenary on 27 January rather than on the resumption of bilaterals on 13 January were rejected by the Independent Chairman on the grounds that the wording was an attempt at a compromise of participants' wishes. Senator Mitchell reported that while he accepted the two Governments wished to have the resumption of plenary as late as possible, other participants wanted a plenary on 13th. In particular, he recognised the concern among some of the parties that the longer the gap, the greater the danger of a resumption of violence.

3. The plenary meeting began at 11.10 when Senator Mitchell reported that everyone understood that a conclusion of item 2 of the agenda was necessary before talks could proceed to the remaining items on the agenda. While there had been a lot of discussion about the International Body's proposals on decommissioning, there had been no agreement. He said that along with his colleagues, he had met all the participants in each of the previous three weeks. They wanted to help facilitate the search for agreement and he confirmed, they remained ready under Rule 30(a), with the support of

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participants, to put forward proposals which might secure agreement. They had been encouraged by the progress made in trilateral discussions between the UUP, SDLP and Alliance however, while some common ground had been identified, no complete agreement had been reached although he believed the remaining differences were capable of being resolved.

5. He reaffirmed his readiness to bring forward proposals under Rule 30(a) although the Chairmen had not identified a solution which they believed would secure agreement among the parties. He hoped that it would be possible to do so. The Chairmen would reflect on what they had heard in the past three weeks, and especially the past two days, to see whether they could put together a proposal which could secure an agreement.

6. He therefore proposed that the talks process should resume on 13 January for meetings among the participants and with the Independent Chairmen. He further proposed that the plenary should reconvene at noon on 27 January, by which time the meetings held in the preceding two weeks might hopefully point the way to resolution of the issue. If the proposals were acceptable to the participants he said he would adjourn the plenary until 27 January and would issue a brief public statement to that effect. He then invited each delegation's views on his proposals.

7. Michael Ancram, for HMG, and Mr Coveney for the Irish both agreed with Senator Mitchell's analysis of the present position. They regretted that it had not been possible to reach agreement on the issue by Christmas but agreed that the Chairmen's proposals represented a constructive way forward. Mr Close (Alliance) also regretted that six months had passed by - some would say had been squandered. What the Chairmen had proposed would allow everyone to reflect and come back in the New Year with determination to reach agreement, which was what the community demanded. He confirmed that his party would be having meetings on 13 January. Mr Curran

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(Labour) concurred with the Chairman's proposals but expressed the regret that the major parties in the talks process had not come to an agreement on decommissioning. He urged them to reflect over Christmas and to return ready to compromise.

8. There then followed an intervention from **Ms McWilliams** which later drew anger from both the DUP and UKUP who, she accused of acting more like school children than responsible politicians. She hoped that in the new 'term', negotiations would take place in a much more serious fashion. She was full of despair about what was going on in the talks process. The community expected and deserved more from its political representatives. For the PUP, **Mr Ervine** briefly stated that he accepted the Chairman's proposals. While he too was disappointed, he was also at the same time heartened by the attitude of some participants who appeared keen to reach agreement. **Mr Farren** for the SDLP endorsed the Chairman's proposals and regretted that the people of Northern Ireland had not received a more hopeful political Christmas present. He however had taken some hope from some of the discussions in which he had been involved, particularly over the last three weeks, with other parties. He believed if the will was there, progress could be made in the New Year. He regretted also that Northern Ireland had not yet received a Christmas present of a renewed ceasefire from the IRA, although he was hopeful that that too might not be far off. He confirmed that the SDLP would be at Castle Buildings for serious business on 13 January.

9. **Mr McMichael** (UDP) reported that his party had only been involved in the periphery of the recent negotiations, although he said he was encouraged that recent meetings had identified areas for further exploration. The objective, he said, of the Talks was to find the maximum area of consensus and he looked forward to that being achieved in the New Year. The UDP, he said, had already begun to arrange meetings for 13 January.

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10. The round of statements accepting the Chairmen's proposals was broken by Dr Paisley who suggested that other delegations were not prepared to face up to the reality of the situation facing them. His party was not prepared to compromise on the issue of decommissioning. He encouraged adherence to the Mitchell principles and called for a determination now of the decommissioning issue. The whole discussion on decommissioning up to now, he said, had been a sharade. His party was ignorant of proposals being discussed by others and urged the Chairmen that if proposals were to be tabled in the future they should be tabled by their originators rather than under the Chairmen's flag. But at the end of the day the reality of the situation was that there would not be agreement because some parties did not believe in decommissioning nor the need for it.

10. He then took a swipe at the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition saying that he was sick listening to people who had no real electoral mandate telling him to respect the wishes of the community. He was more clear of the wishes of the community than others might believe. The clear wish of the people he represented was that decommissioning should be dealt with, and properly, first in these negotiations. He rounded off his statement by saying that he looked forward to hearing the results of the "reflections" of others. No doubt, the break would give the Government time to sort out its whipping arrangements, ensure that people who wanted fish on a Friday got it and that the people of Northern Ireland could be eating beef instead of turkey on Christmas day! But he wondered what further reflections on decommissioning would take place. He encouraged the Chairmen on 13 January to call an informal meeting - not a plenary-of all the delegations to hear the outcome of their reflections. Finally, not to be outdone by other delegations' good wishes for Christmas, in the true style of a Free Presbyterian Minister, he wished delegations and the Chairmen "a pleasant eternity".

11. Mr McCartney uncustomarily began his statement with an expression of thanks to the Chairmen and their staff for their commitment of time to the talks process. And he particularly picked

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out the talks administration unit for praise thanking them, on the record, for the "wonderful service, kindness and courtesy" which they had shown to all the delegations. He then, in more identifiable tones, turned on **Ms McWilliams** saying he was tired of critical remarks being directed at his party from others with no electoral mandate of any substance. He did not need to be patronised by either Labour or the Womens' Coalition. Until those parties stood against him in North Down he needed no lesson in democracy. This prompted an intervention from Mr Curran who wondered if the DUP would put up a candidate in North Down!

12. He then referred to the discussions between the UUP, SDLP and Alliance Party. He regretted that the trilateral document could not be circulated amongst members of the talks but at the same time Mr Maginnis and Mr Farren could talk freely and openly about the terms of its eleven paragraphs on RTE television. He hoped in the New Year that there would be more openness and frankness between delegations.

13. The tour de table was ended by **Mr Taylor** (UUP) who said he was happy with the Chairmen's proposals. The timetable would give space for reflection and further negotiations. He too was concerned about the previous evening's RTE television programme and, in particular, was discouraged by the attitude of the SDLP representative on the programme (Mr Farren) who had quoted freely from the trilateral document. On a point of information **Mr Farren** intervened to the evident enjoyment of other delegates to state that it had been Mr Taylor's colleague (Mr Maginnis) who had quoted from the document! Mr Taylor tried to defend himself by claiming that he had been so upset by the revelations on the programme that he couldn't remember which of the two had broken the confidentiality.

14. All delegations having spoken, the **Chairman** concluded that there was consensus among the delegates for meetings of the talks to resume on 13 January for three days that week and the following week

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and that plenary be adjourned until noon on 27 January. In response to Dr Paisley, the Chairmen proposed, and it was agreed, that on 13 January the Independent Chairman would make a determination on whether or not to hold an informal meeting of the delegations that day.

(Signed)

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