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FROM: R P LEMON  
PS/MICHAEL ANCRAM  
2 JULY 1996

RECEIVED - 9 JUL 1996

*Mr Carson:*  
I suspect that you will  
be as stranded as was I  
on reading Para 7.  
Bell  
2/7

*MS/9/7*  
*NC/43/7*  
*9/15*

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) -B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) -B
- PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) -B
- PS/PUS (B&L) -B
- PS/Sir David Fell -B
- Mr Thomas -B
- Mr Bell -
- Mr Steele -B
- Mr Watkins -B
- Mr Leach -B
- Mr Maccabe -B
- Mr Lavery -B
- Mr Stephens -B
- Mr Beeton -B
- Mr Hill -B
- Dr Smith

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

**MICHAEL ANCRAM'S DINNER WITH UUP REPRESENTATIVES: 1 JULY 1996**

Following Sir John Wheeler's dinner with UUP representatives on 3 June and at the instigation of Ken Maginnis, Michael Ancram met representatives from the UUP for dinner in Hillsborough. Ken Maginnis was in the US but those present were James Cooper (UUP Party Vice-Chairman), Josias Cunningham (UUP President), Sam Gardiner (Forum Member), May Steele (East Antrim Forum Member), Peter King (A Young Unionist from South Antrim) and Robert Newton (Councillor, B.C.C). Dr Smyth was there in support of the Minister.

Summary

2. The occasion was informal and discussion flitted about the table, touching briefly on the role of Select Committees, the "soft" handling of Sinn Fein and the "unhelpful" Mr Bruton, before settling down to a main course of Consensus and Unionist mistrust of HMG. The final course finished with sweeter words of thanks and appreciation for an informal occasion, the like of which could only increase confidence between UUP representatives and HMG. Mr Cooper

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at opposite the Minister and led the discussion for the UUP; Mr Cunningham was an older more calming voice; Mr Gardiner warned against HMG going soft; May Steele an interested bystander; Mr King a young articulate contributor and Mr Newton a "traditional" Unionist Belfast City Councillor.

Detail

3. Mr Cooper and Mr Gardiner raised the "unhelpful" role of Mr Bruton and on more than one occasion Mr Gardiner said that many Unionists resented any representation at talks by the Irish Government. The Minister said that both Governments were fully committed to the process and added that the Taoiseach's recent comments about the unacceptability of IRA actions and his challenge to Sinn Fein to bring about a ceasefire could not be regarded as unhelpful.

4. On the theme of foreign governments, discussion moved to the role of the US Administration. Mr Cunningham said that he was glad to hear the Minister say that support for the IRA had diminished and fundraising was at least reducing if not drying up. The Minister said that there had been a noticeable change in attitude from his first visit to the US in September 1995 and his latest in May 1996. Many Senators and Congressmen were now much better informed and less susceptible to Sinn Fein propaganda. There was a much greater understanding and acceptance of the principle of Sinn Fein's self exclusion from the negotiations.

5. Mr Cooper said that he had been impressed by Senator Mitchell's "high level of tolerance" and praised his patience in the process so far.

6. Cooper said that he was concerned about the principle of consent and a possible future role for Sinn Fein. He said that Unionists liked to think that they would be supported by the Government but this had been shown not to be the case in the past.

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asked where on the agenda was the subject of consent. The Minister said that the principle of consent was fundamental and that it was the agenda - it was not a separate item. Cooper and Gardiner returned to this theme later in the discussion and the Minister repeated that HMG's main concern was the principle of consent, without which there was no democratic legitimacy.

7. Cooper turned briefly to the Forum and said that the inauspicious start had not been helped by the lack of a Government Minister on the opening day. The Minister said that his advice had been that to field a Minister would be to attach a significance which would not have been helpful and to maintain an absolutely independent role for the Forum was more important than having the Secretary of State or the Minister open proceedings on the first day.

8. There followed some discussion on consensus. Mr Newton said that there can be agreement amongst the parties on issues such as housing and socio-economic issues but the difficulty was in agreement on the constitutional question. Gardiner repeated the view that many Unionists resent the presence of the Irish Government at these negotiations. Cunningham noted that the Irish would not be present during Strand One negotiations. He accepted a role for the Irish at this stage and suggested more careful consideration of a "Strand Four" ie relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

9. Cooper said that Sinn Fein had already made it clear that they wouldn't abide by consent and there was therefore no need to set a test, their position was clear. The Minister said that Sinn Fein had said they were committed to the Mitchell Principles however they continued to exclude themselves by not restoring an unequivocal ceasefire. If they were to remove that self exclusion by restoring a full ceasefire, they could be invited by the Secretary of State to take part in talks. Statute would then require them to sign up to the Mitchell Principles in a clear way as the other parties had now done.

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10. Gardiner said that many Unionists would be watching how HMG handled Sinn Fein over the coming weeks and he warned against "taking the gloves off". Cooper said there had been rumours of Sinn Fein challenging their exclusion through the courts. The Minister said they would not have a leg to stand on. Cooper said that for many Unionists any future role for Sinn Fein representatives in Government would be hard to bear. The Minister gently reminded Mr Cooper that democracy ensured that any constitutional party with elected representatives could take part in the democratic process and indeed pre 9 February Sinn Fein Councillors had been involved locally. The Minister said that every party was entitled to a view. He referred to the Scottish Nationalist Party which is totally committed to the break-up of the UK, and made the point that the important difference between Sinn Fein and SNP is that they (SNP) were prepared to pursue their aim through the democratic process, not through violence.

11. The evening wound up with words of appreciation from the delegation and thanks for the opportunity to discuss informally with the Minister some of their "grass-roots" concerns.

Comment

12. The Minister believed this was a valuable occasion which should be extended to include other parties. He will speak with Mr McGrady over the coming days to suggest a dinner with SDLP representatives.

(Signed):

R P LEMON  
PS/MICHAEL ANCRAM

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