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- cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
- PS/Lord Dubs (L,DANI&DOE)
- PS/Mr Worthington (L,DENI&DHSS)
- PS/PUS (L&B)
- PS/Sir David Fell
- Mr Steele
- Mr Thomas
- Mr Bell
- Mr Stephens
- Mr Watkins
- Mr Wood (L&B)
- Mr Hill
- Mr Lavery
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr Perry
- Ms Healy
- Mr Warner
- Mrs McNally

MA 27/5

PS/MR MURPHY (L,B&DFP)

MEETINGS WITH POLITICAL PARTIES: 28 MAY

1. Mr Murphy is meeting delegations from the DUP, SDLP and UUP on Wednesday. This is to provide briefing, which will also be generally useful for the meetings with other political parties that I understand Mr Murphy proposes to hold next week.
2. We are sending you separately notes on the three parties concerned, and on their leading personalities.

General objectives

3. These are largely as for the Alliance meeting. I imagine the Minister will wish mainly to listen and to question. But there will be points to hammer home with particular parties; and the Minister can also (it is after all his third week) expect a certain amount of criticism of Government activity for which he should be prepared. The general aims in the Minister's mind might be:
 - a) **getting to know** those coming along. They will probably be key talks players (the only delegation we have details of, the UUP, features their leading performers). He will want so far as possible to establish confidence and trust with them. This will not be easy with either of

the Unionist parties, some of whose key players are suspicious by nature, and at times more focussed on tensions within their parties, and their position within the Unionists fear, than things outside.

- b) Impressing the parties with out **determination to make progress in the talks, with or without Sinn Féin**. We need to intensify so far as possible; the political pressure on unionists to show flexibility in resolving the decommissioning issue. The Government will need to bring out that it is in a very different position from the old, determined to inject new vigour into the talks process and not in a mood to be rebuffed;
- c) In that context, to begin **sounding out the parties about getting over the decommissioning hurdle**.

Positions of the parties

4. These are distinctly different from one another. In some degree they will be coloured by the local government election results, which are not fully to hand as this is drafted.

- a) The **DUP** did poorly out of a general election campaign which they had conducted on the platform of "the Union in danger". Dr Paisley's meeting with the Prime Minister was fairly good humoured. Dr Paisley has since, however, been irked by the Secretary of State's **visit to Dunloy** ("consorting with law breakers"); her position on **Unionists in the talks**, and the Prime Minister's mention of Frameworks ("taken leave of her senses ... seen beneath the iceberg of Labour policy"). They have also declared that they would not be at the talks on 3 June, because **the Forum has not met in advance**: they seek to assert the primacy of the Forum: Dr Paisley commended it to the Prime Minister as the possible vehicle for carrying forward the political process, simply because it is a place where the majority is a majority. He may also complain about the presence of the **loyalists** in talks, following the recent increase in loyalist paramilitary activity. He would like to have them out of the process, both on account of ancient emerties, and because he would then have a veto on progress (under the sufficient consensus rule, unless, improbably, the UKUP formed a block with the UUP).

All these issues may have to be faced at the meeting, and briefing is provided. Underneath, the DUP may wish to see progress in the talks - Peter Robinson certainly will - whilst publicly taking a hard line position, perhaps announcing in the context of any settlement that they had saved with the Union. Complete agreement with them will always be unlikely; but getting them even partly on side, and forming working relationships as good as can be managed, is helpful to the process. Their approval will rarely be forthcoming; the degree to which they

take hard lines that embarrass the UUP back into the lagger may be more susceptible to influence.

- b) The **SDLP** were deeply frustrated by the lack of movement by Unionists in the previous talks before the election. Though they did not come out of the elections as badly as they might have feared - their share of the vote held up, though Sinn Féin moved ahead - they will still be impatient for the **Governments** to achieve progress - they sometimes have an unrealistic belief (as do the Irish, to a greater extent) in the British Government's ability to bring Unionists into line. It would be difficult for them to acquiesce in any exclusion of Sinn Féin, (though Seamus Mallon suggested something of the sort to the Prime Minister). The meeting may also reflect unease in some Nationalist quarters about the Prime Minister's speech, which some have thought (John Hume's welcome notwithstanding) rather brusque in its squashing of nationalist aspirations. It would be helpful to work hard to ensure that the "land fit for nationalists" message and other Government acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the nationalist aspiration is got over.
- c) The **UUP** were directionless in Talks, declining from the end of the summer onwards to permit any movement, and at times some of them seemingly less and less happy with the idea of an inclusive process, or indeed any sort of initiative directed at a comprehensive settlement. The hope must be that following the general elections, in which they did rather well, - despite the DUP's attempts to embarrass them over their "weakness" in the talks, - they will feel able to be more flexible; and Mr Trimble who always clearly felt himself under threat from within, will now believe that his position is strengthened. They will be pivotal in the resumed talks; unless they open the way to progress there will be none, and the process will be unable to go on (fortunately they are also extremely unwilling to be ~~put~~ seen to have prevented political progress). As Mr Trimble said at his press Conference yesterday, "without me there is no viable process".
- d) It will be important to get over the Government's determination to see movement, and to suggest (without being intimidating) that, with its electoral mandate behind it, and a new confidence, it is better placed to carry it forward. In the short term, the UUP will probably give vent to a number of irritations; they were indignant over the **decision to meet Sinn Féin on local government election day** - "malicious rather than naive"; and at the apparent suggestion of the Secretary of State on "Newsnight" that the **settlement train might leave without Unionists aboard**.

Lines to take

- 5. I enclose a number of general lines to take, and a number of defensive lines directed at particular parties. The Minister may also wish to have to hand

Mr Brooker's submission of yesterday, setting out lines to take over the talks with **Sinn Féin**. SPOB are offering some briefing on recent **parades** issues, with the DUP meeting **particulary** in mind.

(Signed A J Whysall)

A J Whysall

MR MURPHY'S MEETING WITH POLITICAL PARTIES, 28 MAY

General speaking notes

1. We have made clear our **determination to do all we can to secure lasting peace and stability** in Northern Ireland.
2. This is a **top priority** for the whole Government, including the Prime Minister.
3. We believed it right to **lay out our agenda clearly**, even if that ruffled feathers. So we made clear **our complete commitment to the principle of consent**, and to what everyone knows is the consequence of that – that is that Northern Ireland will be part of the UK for many years.
4. But we are **equally committed to making Northern Ireland a place where everyone can feel comfortable**, and to **raising the confidence** of both communities.
5. We shall **seek transparency and openness** where we can: we want to avoid as far as possible the growth of suspicion about hidden agendas.
6. We will **give the Talks process our best shot**. If it can be made to work, it is clearly the most promising means of achieving a settlement on the table. Imposing anything over the heads of parties would be very difficult.
7. We are also entirely clear about **Sinn Féin: we want them in**, and we are taking the risks of having the current meetings to see if that is possible. But we cannot and **will not bend the rules**. Sinn Féin will come in they meet the statutory criteria. **If they do not, the process goes on.**

Talks

8. **The whole Government from Tony Blair down is committed to making the talks process work. We shall not be daunted in this.** The circumstances seem better than for some time for advance. We have a confident and secure

Government; a talks process in being; elections out of the way; clearer signs than for some time of a Republican movement prepared to give up violence for good; an expectation of progress among people in Northern Ireland.

9. We have **tried to create the foundation for flexibility by giving reassurance** – to unionists over the union, to nationalists over the inclusive nature of the process, and our wish for a Northern Ireland in which everyone can be at home. **We hope very much that this will permit generous responses.**

(*To SDLP:* The Prime Minister intended his words on the union to make an impact on unionists – so they had to be forthright. He said nothing that is not in fact well-understood. We are firm in believing, as he made clear, that proper acknowledgments on the nationalist identity and aspiration are required.)

10. Would very much like your **views on moving the Talks forward.**
11. We are **considering ways of meeting concerns about decommissioning**, which we would like if we can to deploy early.
12. How do you see the **prospects? How would we best proceed?**
13. [*Defensive: train leaving without the Unionists*]: as the Secretary of State has herself made clear [*UTV 22 May*] the Unionists are crucial to the process. We will go nowhere without them.

Loyalists (defensive)

14. The position of the loyalists has caused **increasing concern** to all of us.
15. There would **clearly come a point at which escalating loyalist paramilitary activity made the presence of the loyalist parties in the Talks impossible.** We are continuing to look carefully at all the information we have with that in mind.
16. It seems to us **unhelpful, however, if the talks kick off on this subject.** Believe the **risks in that are great.** It would mean that the **Talks were**

distracted right from the start away from the core issue of getting over the decommissioning obstacle.

17. *[Not to DUP]* Moreover **the Ground Rules are clear**: if the Governments are obliged to conclude that that has been a demonstrable dishonouring of Mitchell, **the parties concerned have to go**.

Forum (defensive)

18. We have **moved very early to revive the forum**. The Commons debate cannot take place until immediately after the Whitsun recess (2 June) because of the parliamentary timetable.
19. As to the date of its first meeting, **we are following the 1996 scheme** in providing for it to be after the talks: the forum was, as is clear from the 1996 Act, **an important body but in a role complementary to the talks**, which are the central element of the process.

Meeting with Sinn Fein held on day of local elections: (defensive)

20. The Government's readiness to renew meetings between officials and Sinn Fein was clearly signalled in the Prime Minister's speech of 16 May - in the week before the local elections - and received widespread publicity. Once the decision was made we wished to move with all speed, and Wednesday was the earliest convenient date for all concerned.
21. The purpose of the meeting as the Prime Minister expressed it in his speech was - in the context of one further effort to proceed with an inclusive talks process - to explain the Government's position, and to enable us to assess whether the republican movement is genuinely ready to give up violence and commit itself to politics alone.