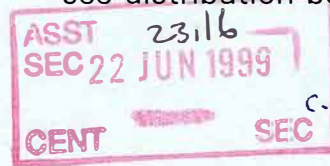


CONFIDENTIAL

FROM: Robert Crawford
Constitutional & Political Division
11 June 1999



cc see distribution below



PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

c.c. Davis Ferguson

RUNNING D'HONDT: MEETINGS WITH THE PARTIES

Miss O'Boyle

1. Mr Smyth
2. Mrs Deane

LD 22/6
2316

As promised please find attached a draft letter to send to No 10 covering the main points from today's meetings.

(Signed)

Handwritten signature
18/6

Robert Crawford
Constitutional & Political Division
11 Millbank ☎ 6591 (Castle Buildings ☎ Ext. 22287)

R126/98

Distribution:

- cc PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
- PS/PUS (B&L)
- PS/Mr Semple
- Mr Jeffrey
- Mr Watkins
- Mr Stephens
- Mr Bell
- Ms Milligan
- Mr McCusker
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr Brooker
- Mr Watson
- Mr Warner
- Mr Heaton, HOLAB

CONFIDENTIAL

DRAFT LETTER FOR PS/SECRETARY OF STATE TO PS/PRIME MINISTER

The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy held meetings today with the NI political parties today to discuss the running of d'Hondt and the proposed changes to the Standing Orders. The main points arising from these meetings are summarised below.

2. The Alliance Party, PUP and UDP were all very keen that d'Hondt should be run as soon as possible, and were prepared to accept any or all of the proposed changes to facilitate this. The PUP (Hutchinson more than Ervine) recorded a general unhappiness with the proposed changes, but said that they would accept whatever was required in order to allow the process to move forward.
3. Sinn Fein took a firm line against all of the changes, arguing that whenever d'Hondt was run, this should be on the basis of the Good Friday Agreement. Changes to Standing Orders represented changes to the Agreement and should therefore not be accepted. Interestingly, Adams said several times that it was more important that d'Hondt be run in accordance with the Agreement than it be run quickly.
4. The SDLP argued against the changes. The change to the language relating to Ministers (replacing "designate" with "nominated") they saw as having no practical effect, and therefore a change which should not be made.
5. Mark Durkan suggested an alternative to the shadow Pledge of Office, which may have merit. Instead of designated Ministers being asked to take a Pledge, at the time of their nomination the Presiding Officer would, in addition to asking them if they were prepared to allow their names to go forward, ask if they were prepared to affirm that they

would adhere to the spirit of the (full) Pledge of Office, including the Code of Conduct. This would resolve the problem the DUP have with the shadow pledge, as all nominees would have to do would be to reply in the affirmative, rather than recite the shadow Pledge. Sinn Fein may oppose it, as the shadow Pledge is set out in the Agreement.

6. The SDLP were strongly opposed to any "sunset clause" in Standing Orders. While they accepted the political necessity of having some form of communication cord to bring the shadow appointments to an end, they were firmly of the view that this should be handled outside Standing Orders. The main argument advanced in support of this was that this issue should not be brought back into the Assembly after d'Hondt had been run.

7. The DUP declared themselves to be against any running of d'Hondt before decommissioning had taken place. The delegation advanced arguments (principally that they expect there to be a large anti-agreement Unionist vote in the European Elections), for instead holding a review of the Agreement. We can expect them to call for this when the results are announced. There was also a complaint from Dr Paisley about lack of contact from the Prime Minister. The Secretary of State promised to write to the Prime Minister recording Dr Paisley's views in detail, and will do so on Monday. During the meeting Ian Paisley Junior said that DUP polling of EU Election votes suggest that Mitchell McLaughlin would have a high percentage of first preference votes (at about 18%) than Jim Nicholson (17%). If correct, this points to very close contest indeed.

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE