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*cc PS Mr Seifelle
& back 1520*



FROM: QUENTIN THOMAS
POLITICAL DIRECTOR
10 MARCH 1998
QT/JC/MR/359

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
- PS/PUS (B&L)
- Mr Bell
- Mr Stephens
- Mr Watkins
- ~~Mr McCusker~~
- Mr Hill
- Mr Howard
- Mr Brooker
- Mr Ferguson
- Mr Whysall
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr Warner
- Mr Ferguson, RID
- Mr Holmes No.10-FAX
- Mr Sanderson Cabinet Office

1048
11 MAR 1998

PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)

AN EXCHANGE WITH MR EMPEY

It may be worth recording a brief exchange in Castle Buildings with Reg Empey. He confirmed that it is his judgement that we need to achieve the agreement, the referendum and the Assembly election before the summer break. He volunteered that the full legislation to implement the deal might have to wait until after the summer holiday. But he expressed concern about the vacuum that would result if either the election or the referendum were not successfully pulled off before the summer break. (This of course contrasts with an earlier UUP view that the Elections should be in the Autumn.)

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2. On the issues, he expressed again his view that the key issue (what he calls the "killing fields" issue) is the nature, powers and functioning of the north/south body. If that could be satisfactorily resolved he believes everything else would fall into place. He saw that there would be a massive drafting job to fill in the details. He expressed the view that much of this would need to be done before the referendum. On the other hand he also, and arguably and consistently, expressed the view that the institutions could be established in shadow form with a good deal of detailed work being done after the agreement and after their establishment: he gave the example of standing orders to be resolved in the Assembly.

3. On timing, Mr Empey made clear that his view was that all the key issues would be resolved in the last 72 hours of the negotiations. This would be true even if we gave ourselves another six months to resolve matters.

4. In answer to a question, Mr Empey explained that the UUP's dialogue with the Irish Side continues. He also made clear that the UUP do not take their exchanges, at least with officials, particularly seriously. In the end it will be a matter for the political leaders, and specifically for the Taoiseach. This confirms the view that the endgame is likely to require the close involvement of both the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, and may be compressed into 3 days or shorter.

(Signed)

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