

① Alan - This would need to go to Mr Cornell report. RF 77

MINUTES OF MINISTERIAL MEETING HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 1999

Present:

Mr Murphy	Mr Bell
Lord Dubs	Mr Stephens
Mr McFall	Ms Dodd
Mr Pilling	Mr Lappin
Mr Semple	Mr Warner
Mr Jeffrey	Mr Smyth
Mr Watkins	

② Pl. file

Apologies:

- Secretary of State**
- Mr Ingram**
- Mr McCusker**

Wider Government Issues

1. The Budget will be on 9 March.

Departmental Ministerial Reports

Lord Dubs

2. The Minister reported that he had opened a conference earlier in the day with the purpose of consulting with all parts of the agricultural sector on CAP reform. The Commission had set a very short deadline for responses so it was important to get a consensus view very quickly.
3. The European Commission had ruled that the Pig Welfare Slaughter Scheme, introduced in Northern Ireland last summer, was in breach of the law. As a result we had been instructed to retrieve money paid out to farmers. The Minister said that the blame lay with Brussels as it had been impossible to get any senior steer from them last August when the crisis was at its height. Follow-up action was being considered.
4. DOE was taking legal advice on whether to appeal the Cottonmount judgement.
5. The Assembly were taking a great interest in the privatisation of Belfast Harbour. A committee had been formed to look at the matter in detail.
6. The Minister hoped to be in position to report on the licensing of Black Taxis very soon.

Mr Murphy

7. Mr Murphy reported that the paper on the costs of new Institutions had issued. However, he had asked for a further breakdown of those more definite elements of the settlement, eg the Assembly etc.

(Mr Carvill - to note)

8. Mr Semple explained that the First Minister was minded to approach the Prime Minister for extra resources. Mr Semple had advised against this course of action. Mr Murphy said he would like to meet the First Minister to discuss financial arrangements in more detail.

(PS/Mr Murphy - to note)

9. Discussion on the Capital Modernisation Fund was deferred until next week to allow all bids to be received.

NIO/NI Departments

10. Mr Semple reported that a paper on the National Grid for Learning would be with the Secretary of State on Tuesday. He also said that the Secretary of State wanted to talk to civil service staff about future administrative arrangements. In particular she had mentioned the CSA. Mr Murphy asked Mr Semple to submit a paper covering the issue.

(PS/Mr Semple - to note)

11. Mr Semple explained that Mr Ingram had been due to visit Paris on Tuesday evening. He was now unable to attend due to illness. Lord Dubs indicated that he could attend. Mr Semple and the Minister agreed to talk further after the meeting.

(PS/Lord Dubs - to note)

12. Mr Semple said that a paper on the Millennium Bug would be submitted to the Secretary of State either later in the day or on Tuesday. It would include briefing on all-island contingency planning for use at the meeting with Mary O'Rourke on Wednesday.

13. Mr Pilling reported that Whitehall departments were currently obsessed with the controversy surrounding Concorde flights and expensive hotels although HMT had been very dismissive about the need to draw up any defensive lines on the issue. The NIO was, however, clean on the issue.

Information

14. Ms Dodd said that Mr Ingram's meeting with the Loughgall truth & justice campaigners, continuing paramilitary beatings, the murder of Eamon Collins and job losses at FG Wilson and Nectar had all made for a difficult past week. The emphasis over the coming days, however, would be on the positive.
15. Mr Murphy would be meeting newspaper editors and TV correspondents over the next few days to take their views on the current state of the political process.

Political Progress

Visit to Dublin

16. The Secretary of State was to visit Dublin on Wednesday. It was agreed that Mr Murphy and Mr McFall would fly down earlier in the morning (9.00am) to enable the Minister of State to attend the meeting with the Taoiseach at 11am.

North/South Implementation Bodies

17. Mr Murphy reported that the unionists thought the papers had gone too far while the SDLP thought they had not gone far enough. Mr Jeffrey said the Prime Minister was keen to meet with Messrs Adams and McGuinness to establish their views on what was proposed.

Conversation with Paul Bew

18. Mr Bell reported on his recent conversation with Professor Paul Bew. He (Bew) thought that there was little likelihood of Mr Trimble forming an executive in the absence of decommissioning. However, he thought that there might be a chance if the PM took the strain and refused to give the green light for real devolution until there was some movement from the paramilitaries.

Security issues

Drumcree

19. Mr Watkins said a submission was being prepared for the Secretary of State which would propose a Scot for the role of mediator. The individual was available and had the necessary skills. Mr Watkins also reported evidence that the Orange Order

was preparing to crank up protests during February, so time was of the essence.

Cultural Review

20. No change from last week.

Collins murder

21. Mr Watkins said there were no obvious leads on the murder of Eamon Collins. It was therefore very important that we said nothing publicly about the incident for the time being.

RUC Ombudsman

22. A paper on the RUC Ombudsman would be submitted to Ministers shortly.

Any other business

Engagement with Assembly members

23. Mr Murphy proposed that a discussion on Mr McFall's paper on engagement with Assembly members should be postponed until another time. This was agreed.

Public Service Pay Announcement

24. Mr McFall agreed to provide Mr Murphy with information on arrangements for funding the pay increases for nurses and teachers.

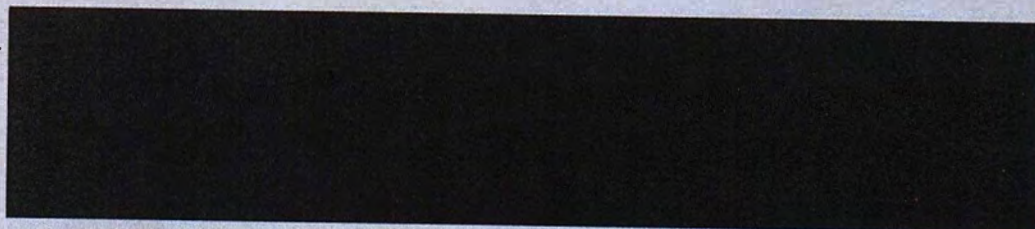
(PS/Mr McFall - to note)

New Deal/Ace

25. Mr McFall said he was still working hard to resolve the issue of New Deal v Ace. The matter, though not intrinsically difficult was none the less very problematic.

Health Grand Committee

26.



Date of the next meeting.

27. The next ministerial meeting will be held at in the VCR at 1pm on Monday 8 February.

Alan Smyth

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