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Reference Code: 2021/98/14

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Meeting with the UDP

20 June 1996

1. We had a bilateral meeting yesterday with the DUP (Gary McMichael, David Adams, John White and Joe English).
2. McMichael said that the ground-rules debate which had suddenly opened up on Wednesday should have been for another day. However, if it had to happen now, so be it. Detecting a conflict between the positions taken respectively by the Attorney General and Michael Ancram on the status of the document, he asked whether we considered it to be amendable.

Q hUiginn strongly endorsed the Attorney General's presentation. He put forward our proposal for how to proceed (in the terms used at the earlier meetings).

3. Adams said the UDP had entered the negotiations on the basis that the ground-rules were part and parcel of the Act which set them up. While there were many aspects of them with which they were not happy, they were prepared to run with them nevertheless. They would be much more comfortable with the ground-rules than with a blank page on which the Unionists would try to write - and, in the process, to "push us out the door". It was not in the UDP's interests to allow the rules of procedure to supersede the ground-rules.

They were also not looking forward to the debate on the agenda. A substantial decommissioning discussion in Plenary would be a major hurdle for them. They wondered whether, if agreement was reached on the rules of procedure, these could be adopted in Plenary prior to consideration of the agenda.

4. Q hUiginn saw problems with this. It was tactically important to treat all of these issues as a single package (in order to forestall UUP efforts to open a further front on the agenda). We needed to get the sub-committee up and running alongside the other strands. Could this be achieved with Trimble?

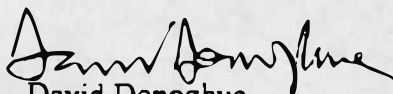
McMichael said that the UDP were not in a position to offer any solutions. They had no authority to agree to how any aspect of decommissioning would be dealt with. They could not provide the bench-marks sought by the UUP. They were absolutely committed to dealing seriously with this issue, but at the same time "one has to be realistic".

5. Adams suggested that Trimble's attitude would be determined by how he emerged from the rules of procedure debate. If the outcome appeared to vindicate the Paisley/McCarney position, Trimble could be expected to seek an alternative victory by taking a harder line on decommissioning.

McMichael and Adams saw some potential for flexibility in the UUP's position generally. McCartney, on the other hand, was out to wreck the process. This was not necessarily true of the DUP, who were trying to achieve as much control of it as possible. McCartney was giving the impression that he was driving the DUP agenda and how long Paisley and Robinson would put up with that was a matter for speculation.

6. English felt that a point was approaching at which the IRA would commit some atrocity in Northern Ireland. If anything were to happen which drew the Loyalist paramilitaries back into conflict, the blame would rest squarely on the IRA's shoulders. He went on to criticise the two Governments for entering too close a relationship with Sinn Féin and to suggest that the IRA violence seen in Adare and Manchester was a consequence of this. O hUiginn challenged both assertions and English retreated, saying that he did not doubt the sincerity of either Government.
7. White emphasised the massive pressure on the Loyalist parties at present in terms of keeping the Loyalist ceasefire intact. An outcome to the procedural debate which had the effect of excluding them would be very unhelpful in this regard. The failure of the British Government to recognise the efforts of the parties on matters such as prisoner issues was also unhelpful.

Agreeing that an approach which led to the expulsion of the Loyalist parties would be utter folly, O hUiginn said that we were working hard to achieve a package which everybody could live with.



David Donoghue

21 June 1996