

CONFIDENTIAL

FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
16 September 1998



cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Murphy (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) - O
PS/PUS (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Semple - O
Mr Watkins - O
Mr Leach - O
Mr Bell - O
Mr Stephens - O
Mr McCusker
Mr Hill - O
Mr Brooker - O
Mr Maccabe - O
Mr Warner - O
Mr Kelly - O
Mr Holmes, No 10

M
30/9/

Mr Jeffrey - O

POLITICAL PROCESS: MEETING WITH FIRST AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

The Secretary of State, Mr Murphy and Mr Ingram yesterday afternoon met Mr Trimble and Mr Mallon to take stock of the overall political scene (no officials were present on either side).


2. In the Secretary of State's view the meeting, which was occasionally tense but not hostile, underscored the growing problem which the Decommissioning/Shadow Executive issue now presents. The discussion touched on a number of areas:

- (a) Standing Orders - The Secretary of State explained that we saw substantial difficulties with the approach Mr Trimble had suggested. Mr Trimble was adamant that we should be able to meet him on this. Mr Mallon expressed his disquiet about the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

First Minister's proposed amendments to the Standing Orders, but rather less strongly than he had done to the Secretary of State privately earlier in the day. It was left that Mr Murphy would look again at the issue, but the Secretary of State's clear view remains that we have little room for manoeuvre on this.

- (b) Decommissioning - Mr Trimble indicated that the end of September target for the establishment of the Shadow Executive was not feasible, and that he had no intention of trying to meet it. Further meetings of the Assembly ahead of a resolution to the decommissioning issue were also difficult. He would, however, be prepared to begin exchanges, with the Deputy First Minister, with the Irish on the identification of North/South bodies (possibly involving an all party group from the Assembly also). Mr Mallon made clear that such a step would be politically extremely difficult for him ahead of a first meeting of the Shadow Executive.
- (c) Future meetings - Given the growing pressure on diaries and the steadily lengthening attendance lists, it was important that future meetings between the NIO and the shadow administration, on both political and administrative matters, were properly structured. Mr  Murphy undertook to produce a paper on this.

3. The Secretary of State subsequently discussed the way forward politically with you and other colleagues: the letter to No.10 setting out options has now issued. We hope that the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister will be able to have a brief discussion before the weekend.

Nick Perry

N P PERRY
Private Secretary

CONFIDENTIAL