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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH  
BÉAL FEIRSTE

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT  
BELFAST



Confidential

*Business*

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PSS*

30 November 1995

*Do see please*

*PAX Mr Murray  
(for [unclear] D/T)*

Mr Sean O hUiginn  
Second Secretary  
Anglo Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs

*[Signature]  
1/12*

*Mr T Dalton  
Amb & W.  
[Signature]*

Dear Second Secretary

**Political contacts at the reception for President Clinton**

I was a guest earlier this evening at the reception held at Queen's University in honour of President Clinton.

There was an invited attendance of roughly one hundred people from Northern Ireland - senior representatives from all political parties, members of the judiciary, captains of industry, senior officials and local dignitaries. The Presidential entourage of roughly one hundred made up the balance.

Following short speeches by the President and the Secretary of State, the latter took the Presidential party around the hall, introducing them to key figures in each of the "pods" in which the guests were organised. The President had brief and essentially social exchanges with the Alliance, Sinn Fein, SDLP, UUP, DUP and Loyalist groups. Private meetings took place later on the margins of the reception with John Alderdice and Gerry Adams. I understand that the President took David Trimble with him in the Presidential limousine from Queen's to the Europa Hotel. (As the journey in question could have lasted two minutes at most, it must be presumed that the encounter continued back at the hotel).

The SDLP were represented by Seamus Mallon, Eddie McGrady and Joe Hendron. Hume

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did not travel from Derry (his colleagues reported with some glee that he had subsequently regretted his decision to stay away). Sinn Fein were represented by Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Lucilira Bhreatnach and Richard McCauley. The Alliance Party were represented by John Alderdice and Seamus Close. The UUP were represented by David Trimble, Jim Nicholson and a number of Unionist mayors. The PUP were represented by David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson and the UDP by Gary McMichael and John White.

As for the DUP, Ian Paisley met the President on his arrival at Whittla Hall but subsequently disappeared into an adjacent Queen's building (in order, no doubt, to be able to claim that he had met the President at Queen's but had not shared the same room as Sinn Fein). His party colleagues, however, took part in the reception on the same basis as the other parties (in a "pod" comprising Peter Robinson, Willie McCrea and Ian Paisley Jr).

In the course of the reception, I had conversations with, among others, Michael Ancram and David Fell; David Trimble; Peter Robinson; Bob McCartney; Gary McMichael; David Ervine; Seamus Mallon; Gerry Adams; Seamus Close; and Mo Mowlam

The following are a number of points of immediate political interest which arose in these conversations.

Ancram

Ancram suggested that, to reinforce the parallelism between the two tracks of the twin-track scheme, it might have been desirable to have the International Body issue a letter inviting cooperation to the parties on the same day as the invitation went out from the Governments in respect of the preparatory talks (i.e. tomorrow).

In discussion, however, he recognised that this was not a very realistic idea, as Senator Mitchell had only just (minutes before) been officially notified of his two colleagues on the Body and it would be a couple of days at least before the latter became operational.

He expects that the Body will seek written submissions in the first instance (particularly as Senator Mitchell does not propose to be back until 15 December - a separate report refers). The British Government will probably begin with a written submission but might field representatives (Ministers?) for face-to-face exchanges with the Body at a later stage.

Ancram presumes that modalities (Washington 2) and legal aspects will be among the issues of interest to the Body in its dealings with both Governments.

As for the political track, he speculated that David Trimble might opt not to reply to the letter which the two Governments will be issuing tomorrow. Trimble indicated to him recently that this might be his approach. (Comment: I received a similar hint in my own conversation with Trimble this evening - see below).



Ancram thought it preferable that the UUP leader would ignore, rather than openly reject, the invitation contained in the letter. Trimble's form of "critical acquiescence" with the twin-track scheme (the approach he had signalled to Ancram recently) would be to involve the UUP in continuing bilateral dialogue with the British Government on a basis which would enable him technically to deny that he was operating within the scheme. Once he entered the room, of course, British Ministers would be discussing with him the subject-matter of the political track and they would certainly be representing meetings with him as bilaterals under the terms of Tuesday's communique.

Ancram went on to speculate that Trimble might be willing to go to Dublin for a bilateral on the same "deniable" basis. While offering no evidence to support this, he thought that Trimble might be open to persuasion in this respect - provided he was not required by the Irish Government to sign up to acceptance of the twin-track scheme. (I suggested that the Government would wish to be flexible in this regard). Ancram said that British Ministers would certainly be pressing the UUP leader to talk to the Irish Government.

His main concern is to minimise procedural complications with a view to "giving Trimble the space he needs". He recalled that the UUP refused meetings with himself over many months for as long as he (Ancram) was talking to Sinn Fein. In the end, however, they came round and resumed contact quietly. He hopes that the same "softly softly" approach on this occasion will enable gradual entry by the UUP into the scheme.

The line which British Ministers will take at their meetings with Trimble is that his only hope of generating the necessary consensus for an elected body will be to agree to discuss it within the twin-track scheme.

As for the other parties, Ancram expects that the SDLP will look for a joint meeting with both Governments. He would not, however, be expecting John Hume's reply "by return of post" (given the latter's record of responses to NIO letters). Sinn Fein will presumably seek a meeting with the Irish Government in the first instance. He expects early contact with Alliance and "phone-calls from the Loyalist parties by tomorrow morning" (a sarcastic reference to the latter's hunger for political recognition).

Finally, Ancram praised the balanced and judicious language of President Clinton's speech at Mackie's. He added, half-jokingly, that the photograph of the President's handshake with Gerry Adams might be of value if it were to have the effect of forcing a sterner Presidential line on IRA violence. A record of his meeting with Adams, Ancram suggested, would be unhelpful in an election year if punishment beatings etc were still continuing.

Fell

Fell expects Ancram to have a "quiet word" with Trimble in the Commons next week. This would effectively be the beginning (or, as Trimble would prefer, continuation) of the UUP's bilaterals with the British Government.

Fell also observed that, if e.g. Alderdice were to request a bilateral with Trimble to discuss Tuesday's communique, the UUP leader could hardly refuse and would therefore find himself, "whether he likes it or not", operating within the terms of the scheme.

Trimble

Our exchange opened with a bantering remark from Trimble (after I had mentioned my present assignment in Maryfield) that "you'll pay for your sins".

As to his likely response to the Governments' invitation to talks, he recalled advice given to him by Jim Molyneaux to the effect that the way to deal with any difficult letter is to refer it to the next (quarterly) meeting of the party executive. We could "take it as read", he warned cheerfully, that he would be treating our invitation in that fashion.

When I raised in an oblique way the idea of a bilateral with the Irish Government which would not be explicitly linked to the twin-track scheme, Trimble gave a careful but well-disposed reply: "I hear what you say - but let's first wait and see".

Robinson

Peter Robinson was in relaxed and even amiable form. He indicated that the DUP will "continue" its dialogue with the British Government, though this will be outside the twin-track scheme. The party will also have contact with the other (constitutional) parties and, at the end of the period envisaged in Tuesday's communique, will take stock and "decide what to do".

As regards the Body, they have not yet considered how to present their views. Robinson claimed, however, that an undertaking by Mitchell (during an interview today) to consider the question of disarmament of the security forces was problematic and might affect the DUP's readiness to cooperate with him.



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He made clear that he has little faith in the exercise and expects "absolutely nothing" to change as a result of the Body's work.

### McCartney

I joined a group around Bob McCartney as he was in mid-tirade against the British Government ("perfidious Albion") for the "fudge" on the decommissioning issue in Tuesday's communique.

In private conversation, he moderated his remarks somewhat, predicting that the twin-track scheme would in fact be a one-track arrangement with "one train accelerating rapidly down the political track while the other - decommissioning - remains parked in the station".

### Loyalists

David Ervine and Gary McMichael will be seeking early meetings with the British Government as well as contacts with other parties.

While recognising that they have each had bilaterals with the Irish Government before, they do not feel able to repeat this under the twin-track scheme, as the latter is a joint initiative involving the two Governments to which they object in principle. The purpose of their visits to Dublin earlier this year was to voice Loyalist criticisms of Irish Government positions. The present invitation is a different matter.

### Seamus Mallon

Mallon indicated that the SDLP will probably seek a "quiet meeting" with the Irish Government to consider matters generally and to review the options for future meetings in the twin-track scheme.

### Gerry Adams

Adams was in very relaxed form. He was happy both with the President's speech

and with the arrangements for bilateral contact during the day.

He mentioned his conversation with the Taoiseach late on Tuesday night and a general understanding of a possible early meeting.

His colleague Richard McCauley was pleased at the President's emphasis today on the need for full involvement of "risk-takers" in the political process. He also welcomed a reference by the President (in his remarks this evening) to "mutual consent" - which implies the need for nationalist, as well as Unionist, consent to new arrangements.

Alliance

Seamus Close suggested that the Alliance Party might seek a joint meeting with the two Governments. (He was aware of arrangements already made for a meeting with the Irish Government next Thursday).

David Fell, to whom Close also proposed a joint meeting, was distinctly unenthusiastic. He suggested that, while there is of course provision for joint meetings under the communique, British Ministers will be hoping that any such requests will be made a little later in the process - to allow the UUP time to come to terms with the scheme and, hopefully, to participate in it in some way.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue  
Joint Secretary