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**FROM: D McALEER
INFORMATION SERVICE
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PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

WEEKLY INFORMATION BULLETIN 6 OCTOBER-12 OCTOBER 1997

Prospects for the Week

It will be another 'historic' week for the media pack at Castle Buildings and a large turnout is expected for the start of substantive negotiations on Tuesday against a background of apparently growing Unionist misgivings and deep internal divisions.

Business will start without the UUP leadership as David Trimble, John Taylor and Jeffrey Donaldson travel to the United States on Saturday 4th and are not expected to return until mid-week. Reg Empey is expected to take the lead in their absence.

The three strands will be discussed consecutively and all participants are likely to issue statements of their opening positions. Ten parties and two Governments will be in competition for media attention on what will be a very busy day. A media plan has been drawn up to ensure we make the best of the opportunities available to us to set the scene and to reiterate the Government's messages through the day as business develops.

The Secretary of State continues her 'meet the people' tour with a visit to Dungannon council area on Wednesday. She will meet councillors and others to discuss local issues. Included in the programme is a meeting with the South Tyrone Area Partnership, which includes Mrs Bernadette McAliskey who can be expected to want to discuss the case of her daughter Roisin and her impending extradition to Germany.

Mr Murphy's visit to Derry City Council on Wednesday evening is to focus primarily on economic matters but it appears likely that the Government's position on evidence relating to Bloody Sunday will be raised.

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On Thursday the Minister will speak to the EU Liaison Conference at QUB and will outline Government policy on a range of EC issues, also defining the Minister's role on EU matters. In the afternoon a meeting with NIC/ICTU and CBI will focus on feedback re the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Consideration is being given to the time and place of an announcement by the Secretary of State of the Government's intentions on the Parades Bill. Final decisions have not yet been taken on the content of the Bill.

Controversy is likely to surround the invitation to the Secretary of State to take part in the BBC Question Time programme later this month. Some media have already seized upon the fact that Sinn Fein and other parties are likely to be invited.

There is also likely to be continuing media interest in the case of Colin Duffy following the dropping of murder charges due to insufficient evidence. Some commentators have argued the case for a public enquiry.

Mr Ingram will lead one of the largest ever IDB trade missions to the United States this week. Twenty-six companies from a broad cross-section of NI industry will be represented in Chicago and New York. In addition to meetings with industrialists the Minister's programme will include an address to the National Strategy Forum on the themes of political development and the economic message and a series of media interviews.

The Conservative Party Conference takes place this week in Blackpool.

Opportunities this week

Mr Murphy will give an informal briefing to local political correspondents in preparation for the start of talks. We will aim for a Ministerial presence on the Tuesday morning bulletins and the Information Service will closely monitor the story through the morning. A lunchtime statement may be supplemented by interviews depending on Ministerial availability and the course of events. It will be important to put our position on the record between Strands one and two. The same approach will be used for early evening bulletins, followed by a wrap-up press conference later in the evening.

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Mr Ingram's programme of media interviews in New York and Chicago is timely in providing a platform to highlight progress in the talks for the North American audience.

The Dungannon and Derry City Council visits on Wednesday could provide useful doorstep opportunities to reinforce the Government's messages on developments at the talks. It is possible a protest in support of Roisin McAliskey could be organised for the benefit of visiting media in Dungannon.

Attendance at the European Liaison Conference and meetings with NIC/ICTU and the CBI on Thursday would also provide media opportunities if required.

KEY THEMES

Political

The Government's stated intention is to ensure that the vital principles of democracy underpin developments towards a long-term political settlement. Lasting stability must grow out of a broad consensus and the clearly articulated desire for disparate groupings to work together in the common interest. Consent has always been, and remains, the key issue in any proposals for change.

The views of political leaders and their constituents are welcomed by the Government, which is committed to a more open and accountable approach. New institutions can and will be developed only in ways which take full account of the interests and aspirations of both communities.

The British and Irish governments agree that the way forward must be on the basis of implementing all aspects of the Mitchell report. These proposals offer a fair and balanced approach.

Talks

We have turned an important page in the history of Northern Ireland. The new chapter we shall be writing will involve inclusive and substantive negotiations,

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taking place in a peaceful atmosphere. Such talks have the potential to bring huge benefits to all the people of these islands and especially the people of Northern Ireland.

All the participants will need courage and imagination. But the machinery is now in place for a fair and effective negotiation, capable of addressing all the issues of concern to all participants and leading to a political settlement which will be widely acceptable throughout the community in Northern Ireland, throughout the island of Ireland and throughout these islands. No-one has anything to fear from seeking such a settlement. Everyone's essential interests are protected. Everyone has much to gain.

DUP/UKUP

Government would like to see the two parties taking part in the multi-party talks process. The DUP and UKUP have valuable roles to play and the Unionist voice will be strengthened by having them at the table. The Government is by no means excluding or marginalising them.

Sinn Fein

A commitment to non-violence and democracy is the only basis for the negotiations. We are in no doubt that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked. If Sinn Fein dishonour their commitment to the Mitchell principles, whether through their own actions or a return to IRA violence, they will be out of the negotiations. Gerry Adams has signed Sinn Fein up to the Mitchell principles, so they are committed to:

- exclusively peaceful means;
- total disarmament of all paramilitaries;
- renounce force and oppose its use by others (eg IRA); and
- accept any agreement in the negotiations.

We shall hold Sinn Fein to these commitments. The Mitchell principles commit Sinn Fein to the total disarmament of all paramilitaries. As Mitchell said, there has to be a compromise. We support his compromise of decommissioning during negotiations. Mr Adams said he would approach these negotiations on the basis of 'compromise, compromise, compromise'. He, like everyone else, must deliver.

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Peter Taylor Programme about IRA/Sinn Fein (Part III this week)

Don't propose to comment on the detail of the book. Almost all of it is concerned with events under previous Governments.

Our focus is on the future. This Government has set out in public its approach to Northern Ireland. We have set out in public our dealings with Sinn Fein.

We now have the first opportunity in modern times to have unionists and nationalists, loyalists and republicans around the same table to find together an acceptable settlement for the future.

Sinn Fein can have an important part to play in that - but only on the basis that they and the whole Republican Movement are committed to a future determined by agreement in negotiations on the basis of exclusively peaceful methods.

We are under no illusions about the difficulties and challenges ahead. But we are determined that this opportunity for peaceful negotiations should be used to the full.

Secret contacts with the IRA

It is not for me to comment on events under previous Governments. Previous Governments have offered their own explanations.

This Government has been open about its own exchanges with Sinn Fein. We now have a new situation. Whatever the justification for secret contacts in the past, Sinn Fein are now openly in negotiations on the same basis as everyone else.

What matters now is what is said across the table in the negotiating chamber in full view of all the participants. Our focus now is to move on to substantive discussion on the political issues.

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Secret plans for withdrawal

Nonsense. It's not for me to answer for previous Governments, but we remain committed to the constitutional guarantee and the "triple lock". As the Prime Minister said in Belfast on 16 May:

"Any settlement must be negotiated not imposed; it must be endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum; and it must be endorsed by the British Parliament."

Decommissioning

The Independent Commission on Decommissioning is fully operational, coinciding with the launch of substantive negotiations.

It is an independent body and it will determine its own programme of work. We look forward to the Commission developing with the talks participants, the two Governments and others as appropriate, schemes for decommissioning.

Consent

Both Governments remain fundamentally committed to the principle of consent in all its aspects, as set out both in United Kingdom law in section 1 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act and in the Downing Street Declaration.

This means that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people. Moreover, we are committed to putting any agreed outcome to the negotiations to the people of Northern Ireland for approval in a referendum.

As far as the political negotiations are concerned the guarantees are even stronger. This is because of the "Triple Lock" which requires the consent of the parties, Parliament and the people of Northern Ireland themselves.

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Parades Bill

Government has already indicated its commitment to implementing the North Report. It therefore intends to introduce a Bill in the House of Lords after the summer recess.

The Government is convinced that the new arrangements provided for in the Bill will bring a more rational approach to the issue of parades.

Prisons

All prisoners in Northern Ireland (except life sentence) are currently eligible for automatic release having served half their sentence and we are not considering earlier release at present. However, as the ceasefires hold other options become possible. Any change in the rules on remission would require legislation.

Changes in the prison regime announced recently in response to representations made by Loyalist politicians, when taken together with other recent regime improvements, now offer a very generous package to prisoners unique to Northern Ireland and clearly demonstrate our willingness to develop the regime in a climate of stability and co-operation.

The Prison Service is continuing with its examination of working practices and other issues

Security

We condemn without reservation any use of violence in whatever form.

While there remains any threat from terrorist groups it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that adequate measures are in place to safeguard the public.

The police and army have made a number of changes to the security profile following the ceasefire, including reductions in security force patrols and military support to the RUC.

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However our approach to security will be examined in the light of recent events and we will act accordingly. We will not move more quickly than events on the ground allow. Any steps already taken can be quickly reversed if necessary.

Internment

Intention to remove from Emergency Provisions: Nobody should be surprised by this announcement. After all it has been the policy of New Labour for some time and the Secretary of State was honouring a commitment she made two years ago at the Party Conference. Internment as a measure has not been applied for more than 20 years.

Bloody Sunday

The new material which has been submitted to the Secretary of State is being considered and Government hopes to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Duffy Case

(Criticism of police charges/investigation) It would not be appropriate to comment on this, we are not in a position to do so. This is entirely a matter for the DPP and the police to look at, and we are sure the police will want to review the case in light of this development.

(Independent Inquiry into police investigation?) Murder inquiry is continuing; ICPC supervised cases of complaint are ongoing; an independent inquiry is not justified in this case.

Rights and Confidence Building

This Government is committed to the fundamental principles of fairness and justice; there will be no second-class citizens. We are determined to see full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights and freedom from discrimination for everyone. We are committed to building a society where the different identities are treated equally and enjoy mutual respect.

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We will seek wherever possible initiatives to build confidence throughout the community and have announced a programme of specific measures including:- incorporation of the ECHR; combating discrimination in labour market; implementation of North Report. We will also seek to increase confidence in the RUC through reform of structures and the complaints system

These measures will threaten no-one and reflect sound principles which should underpin any fair minded society.

It is important that confidence-building is seen as something which is of importance to both the main communities in Northern Ireland. It would be wrong to think of it in terms of a 'shopping list' put forward by one community to the exclusion of the other. This Government wants to win the trust and confidence of both communities in Northern Ireland by clearly being seen to be fair and even-handed to everyone.

(Signed)

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