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CONSTITUTIONAL & POLITICAL DIVISION
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cc (list below)

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M'Carra
To note X at para 7
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FILE NOTE

MEETING WITH DR PAISLEY, 17 JUNE

Mr Murphy, accompanied by Mr Semple, Mike Gapes MP and me, met Dr Paisley and Peter Robinson at the House of Commons at 4pm on 17 June.

2. Mr Murphy ran through the same list of essentially practical issues as he had done with all the other parties the previous week.
3. The meeting was low key and cordial and gave rise to no surprises. Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson were quite content for the Assembly to meet in the week beginning 29 June (although Dr Paisley thought John Hume would be seriously discommoded as it was a "Brussels" week and Mr Hume's attendance record meant that he was at risk of losing significant allowances if he did not attend). They appeared already to have assumed that the Assembly would elect a First Minister and Deputy First Minister, appoint a Rules Committee and go into recess until around September.
4. The only points of specific interest were:
 - a. Seating: the DUP would not wish to be seated next to Sinn Fein. Mr Murphy said that if the "Talks" arrangements were carried through the SDLP would act as a buffer;
 - b. Dr Paisley seemed interested in the idea of tax varying powers but Peter Robinson pointed out that through its control of the regional rate the Assembly would already have considerable fiscal powers, and easily persuaded Dr Paisley that tax varying powers should be left for later consideration;
 - c. The DUP clearly envisage acting as the Opposition (ie not taking Ministerial posts).
5. The bulk of the discussion focused on the precise details of the facilities which would be available to members of the Assembly once they had taken their seats. The DUP - characteristically - has clearly given careful thought to this (and secured advance commitments from each

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candidate that they will - if elected - contribute £5,000 per annum of their Assembly salaries towards the cost of party support arrangements). They probed on:

- the number of rooms likely to be available to each party, demonstrating that 2 would be quite insufficient;
- the amount of the Office Costs Allowance for each member and how it would be paid (? quarterly against receipts); and whether the pay of secretaries etc would be administered by the Fees Office;
- the availability of stationery and free postage and telephone calls (within the UK!);
- 'Short' money/party support allowances. They urged that detailed information should be made available as soon as possible to enable members, once elected, to get staff appointed, offices sorted out and so on. Constituency business would start to flood in on 26 June!

Comment

6. After the meeting Mr Murphy noted that he had several times told parties that they would be receiving full details of salaries and allowances shortly; and that the "Omnibus" letter to the parties again promised details in the near future. He also felt that the DUP had a good point in arguing for early notice of the facilities which would be available to members once they have taken their seats. More generally, he is concerned that the Assembly should get off to a smooth and efficient start, avoiding any niggles over administrative arrangements and giving the newly-elected members a sense that they were being treated appropriately as elected representatives soon to acquire very extensive responsibilities for the future government of Northern Ireland and the creation of a new type of politics in Northern Ireland and a new relationship between North and South in Ireland.

7. He would welcome detailed advice (from Mr Semple and Mr Carson?) on what facilities, allowances etc will be available to members of the Assembly once they have taken their seats; how and when this will be communicated to the parties and to new members, once elected; and what arrangements are being made to ensure a smooth and efficient start to the life of the Assembly from an administrative point of view.

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8. Perhaps I could mention here a separate but related point, raised by the Secretary of State: she assumes that arrangements for issuing passes to new members (presumably subject to them taking their seats) will be part of the administrative arrangements made to receive new members and hopes that this can be completed on the Assembly's first sitting day.

Signed

D J R HILL
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