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Prime Minister

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

Roderic Lyne Esq CMG
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 0AA

Quick glance.
Confirms the
advice given at today's
meeting. V. Stern!
Engl. 2/12

2 December 1993

Dear Rod,

NORTHERN IRELAND TALKS: STRAND I INSTITUTIONS

I enclose a note setting out our best assessment of what new internal institutions might look like in Northern Ireland, given what we know of the Northern Ireland parties' positions from the Talks process. I also enclose a summary.

You will recognise the text; it is extracted from the paper which I sent to you on 2 November explaining our proposals on all three strands.

I would emphasise the following -

- It is not an agreed document, negotiated with the Northern Ireland parties. The text is based largely on the discussions during the political talks last year but those discussions did not lead to a conclusive agreement on Strand I institutions;
- The text is our best guess as to how a compromise might be constructed, based on our knowledge of the parties' views. Given that their positions are to some extent contradictory or have yet to be fully explored, the paper contains a number of assumptions of our own about where agreement could be found;
- These proposals for Strand I cannot be considered in isolation from Strands II and III, as it is of the essence to the Talks process that agreements in one strand are



likely to be counterbalanced by agreements in the other two Strands. An obvious example here is that the extent to which the SDLP, for example, are given a meaningful role in internal structures in Northern Ireland will have a bearing on the degree to which they will look for strong North/South institutions and for the Irish Government to retain a direct interest in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland.

- Because of the inter-relationship between the 3 strands these proposals in Strand I do not exist comfortably outside a package for all three strands as a whole. We would, nevertheless, regard them as being within the potential zone of convergence.

There is no prospect of the SDLP agreeing to a purely internal solution. They would see the implementation of Strand I proposals alone, in advance of agreement on Strands 2 and 3, as a breach of the understanding that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, on which the present talks process is based. Without their agreement, we would not have the widespread acceptance that we have always judged necessary if new local political institutions are to be workable and durable.

Now!

Sir Patrick and Michael Ancram both consider that premature announcement of broad agreement on Strand I, not only risks being denounced by two of the four NI parties, but would also wreck the talks process which continues to offer the best prospect of achieving an overall settlement which commands broad support.

A copy goes to John Sawers and Melanie Leech.

Yours,

Jonathan

JONATHAN STEPHENS