

FROM: PUS
6 FEBRUARY 1991

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cc. PS/Secretary of State (L) [1]
Mr Pilling [2]
Mr Deverell - B [3]

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

POLITICAL MOVEMENT - CABINET SECRETARY

I saw Sir Robin Butler this afternoon, together with Mr Appleyard, at the Cabinet Office. We went through the Secretary of State's minute to the Prime Minister, and I told Sir Robin of the main points which arose in discussion between the Taoiseach and the Secretary of State at last week's Intergovernmental Conference.

2. I said that in view of that, and the fact that we were waiting for a considered assessment of the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis last weekend (which might take a little time as some of it would rely on human intelligence sources) I thought the Secretary of State might want to update the Prime Minister next week rather than this. I did not then know that the Secretary of State is to have a bilateral with the Prime Minister on 13 February; nor clearly did the Cabinet Secretary.

3. Sir Robin's purpose was to bring himself and Mr Appleyard up-to-date on developments, and to enquire whether major decisions on British policy towards the Provisionals seemed imminent. On that score, I said I thought the likeliest factor to precipitate a crisis would have been a unilateral call by the Irish Government (or just conceivably John Hume) for a joint declaration by the two governments. Given what the Taoiseach had said at his meeting with the Secretary of State last week, that seemed highly unlikely. However, a sudden and final breakdown on the open political development process could also precipitate a crisis, and that could come if the Unionist parties decided to walk away from the process over the next few weeks because of Irish intransigence.

4. I also mentioned the mounting frustration of some of the Church intermediaries, though this was secondary. Easter with its 75th anniversary of 1916 (in April that year) was an event to be

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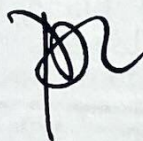
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kept in view, against the possibility of a further, perhaps more prolonged unilateral ceasefire by the Provisionals accompanied by demands for some tangible response.

5. Finally, we spent a little time discussing the "no contact" issue and (in general terms) the nature and reliability of the channels through which signals reached us.

6. I had no indication that the Cabinet Secretary was likely to advise the Prime Minister to bring other Ministers in at this stage. Sir Robin Butler will be in the Province himself in the first half of March and we are considering a programme - he asked that it should be essentially operational in character, rather than devoted to parish visiting and I am trying to ensure that he will get briefings with the Chief Constable and the GOC as well as ourselves in the course of it.

7. The only other point to record is the obvious one that any issues which could create difficulty with our EC (and other) partners during the hostilities should if at all possible be deferred until they are concluded.



J A CHILCOT

6 FEBRUARY 1991