PO/35/251(1)

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1. Intensive shuttle diplomacy on the part of Sir N Stephen. Atmosphere improves.

2. On 16 October SOSNI had a short meeting with the Irish. Both Governments agreed that the best chance of progress lay in the proposal that Sir Ninian Stephen should invite all the talks participants to submit to him privately their individual suggestions for Heads of Agreement across all three Strands. It was a high risk strategy, but Sir Ninian appeared well aware of the extreme delicacy of the task and the importance of getting his synthesis right first time. There was a slight danger that Sir Ninian's report would be based on the lowest common denominator of the parties' submissions and thus not form the basis of a workable blueprint; this was a risk which would have to be taken.

/3.....

3. On the afternoon of 16 October there was a short session of the Strand 2 committee. Sir Ninian formally asked the parties to submit to him, either orally or in writing, their ideas for Heads of Agreement, their concept of the areas where their proposals agreed with those of other delegations, and their views on any areas where they perceived disagreements to exist. Sir Ninian would then correlate the submissions with his own impressions and formulate his report. He had no preconceptions about the form the report would take, and indeed he realised that there was disagreement between the participants as to the scope of the exercise; he saw the process as being a dynamic one which would assume a more coherent form during the course of the following week's consultations.

4. On timetable, Sir Ninian suggested that 19 and 20 October be taken up with bilateral consultations with the NI political parties and that he should talk to the two Governments separately on 21 and 22 October. On 23 October he would report progress to the entire sub-committee either orally or on paper. This, however, he stressed, was only an outline, and changes could be made if people felt it desirable. In addition, he encouraged the delegations to talk to each other as much as possible.

5. These proposals were accepted, albeit with some reservation by the SDLP.

Outlook

6. The talks have thus entered an entirely new stage. Sir Ninian is now effectively in control of all three Strands and the nature of his proposed shuttle diplomacy over the next week (and possibly for longer) means that events could begin to develop very quickly. Information about who is saying what to whom will be at a premium.

7. In preparation for its meeting with Sir Ninian on 21 October the HMG team is drawing up model Heads of Agreement which it

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Note EMD

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EMD

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This synopsis was dictated to EMD by BD when questioned about it.

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Report of PO135/251(8)
inter-party
talks
circa 1991
Imp. (os)
Brit -> BD -> Rep.
(internally)