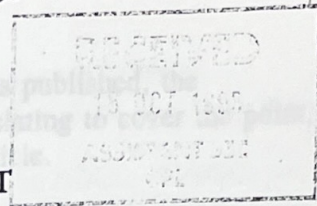


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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA



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From the Private Secretary

18/10

17 October 1996

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Dear Gen,

MEETING WITH THE UUP, 17 OCTOBER

David Trimble, Martin Smyth and Anne Smith (UUP Bureau Chief for North America - here for the UUP Party Conference) called on the Prime Minister this afternoon for 50 minutes. It was a low-key, friendly occasion. Although Trimble had asked for the meeting, he did not seem to have burning points he wanted to make, and the Prime Minister made most of the running.

The Prime Minister began by asking about the UUP Party Conference at the weekend, and particularly about the difficulties which seemed to have arisen over Cecil Walker. Trimble did not seem to be looking forward to the occasion much. He gave a somewhat confused account of media manipulation of Walker, but concluded that, for whatever reason, he now had a real problem on his hands.

The Prime Minister went back to various points discussed during his last meeting with Trimble in Bournemouth:

- (i) Visit to Washington: Sir John Kerr's advice was that Trimble could visit Washington at more or less any time of his choosing, but the period before the Presidential election could be as good a time as any, since Washington actors such as Lake had more time on their hands at the moment. Trimble expressed some surprise and said that he had been more inclined to wait until after the election, because some of the key actors might change. However, he would reflect on this.
- (ii) Intercept evidence: Lord Lloyd's unpublished report was likely to make recommendations on this issue going in the same direction as Trimble had suggested. There was a good deal of sympathy for this approach within the Government, although there were obvious

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difficulties. When the Lloyd Report was published, the Government would be interested in legislating to cover the point, perhaps using an existing legislative vehicle.

- (iii) Decommissioning Legislation: unless something happened to make it irrelevant, the Government continued to plan on publishing and enacting the Decommissioning Bill in the next Session. It would be in The Queen's Speech. Trimble welcomed this.
- (iv) Grand Committee: the Prime Minister's reference to this in his Bournemouth speech had not attracted as much adverse comment as he had expected. We would want to get on with this. Trimble again welcomed this, although it had been a long time coming. Smyth commented that SDLP MPs like McGrady and Hendron saw the attractions for them, from a constituency point of view.
- (v) Loyalist Prisoners: we continued to look for ways to do something for them, but had not so far found any. Trimble confirmed that he would be visiting them the following day, the first time for a couple of years. One problem seemed to be the operation of the Life Sentence Review Board, where there was a trend of "knocking back" Loyalist prisoners more than others. He did not understand why this was so - the Board consisted of officials, who were presumably not acting under any Ministerial instruction. In any case, he wondered whether the first review of sentences could not be brought forward from its existing 10 years. This might not change anything in practice, since cases would still be considered on their individual merits as now, but it might give extra hope. I mentioned that one problem was the poor behaviour record of the Loyalist prisoners. Trimble acknowledged this - they did not have the discipline of Republican prisoners or, apparently, their interest in intellectual pursuits. He wondered whether restoring the ability to work and/or garden might help alleviate their boredom and consequent frustration. (I would be grateful for advice on whether there is anything in this).

Talks

Trimble said that some progress was now being made, following agreement on the plenary agenda, despite the absurd hyping of the latter (for which he was inclined to blame the NIO!) In any case, the accusations of Paisley and McCartney, that agreement on the agenda meant that decommissioning had been sidelined, had been comprehensively demolished by the 31 minutes devoted to the comprehensive talks agenda before decommissioning had been reached. McCartney was now boring everyone rigid

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with his views on decommissioning - he had a destructive personality. Discussions on decommissioning would no doubt continue well into next week.

The Prime Minister asked about relations with the SDLP. Trimble said that they had not been particularly helpful about the agenda issue, although they had agreed in the end. He was not sure how far it would be possible to get with them. The Prime Minister commented that there were some interesting cross-currents. If the SDLP left the talks, they would collapse. The Irish were worried that, in these circumstances, the Loyalists would carry out attacks in the Republic. This provided some glue to keep the SDLP in the talks. The issue now was what progress could be made without Sinn Fein, and therefore what further entry hurdles should be erected for Sinn Fein post-Lisburn.

Ceasefire/Decommissioning

The Prime Minister said that we still had to deal with the approaches from John Hume, the Churches and others asking us to clarify our policy. Trimble was already aware of these approaches (Trimble said that he was, but he had not been shown any text). We were not yet ready to respond to these approaches but would talk it through with Trimble again before we did so. We continued to hear from various sources that a ceasefire could be available and that Lisburn had been aimed at keeping the IRA together. We took all this with a very large pinch of salt but it was difficult to ignore altogether. If we did not respond to Hume, we could be accused of passing up a real chance for a new ceasefire. If we did, we could be accused of negotiating with the IRA. It was not easy to find a way through this.

Trimble said that the focus now had to be on the new hurdles. Lisburn had opened up an important psychological opportunity. If something effective could be said about the terms of a credible ceasefire, then it might be possible to get round decommissioning in a satisfactory way and get on to the substance. But if the entry terms were not defined satisfactorily, the UUP would have to insist on their decommissioning position. They could not take any gambles with this.

The Prime Minister said that our thinking was similar. There were various ways of defining the entry conditions - a time period, and/or criteria for IRA behaviour on the ground. Our aim was not to make Sinn Fein's entry impossible, but to make the conditions stiffer. But this had also to be done without pushing the SDLP out of the talks.

Trimble said that if the decommissioning legislation was continued with, and if the Commission was set up, however inchoate (in Sir Patrick Mayhew's phrase), this would make it much easier for the UUP to agree to set aside decommissioning otherwise and agree to entry conditions. What UUP wanted

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to avoid at all costs was decommissioning disappearing into a Committee, where it could be blocked by the double veto of the Irish Government and the SDLP. The Prime Minister commented that this was surely a problem which could be got round. The issue was bound to return to the plenary. Trimble said that the Irish and the SDLP had a double veto in the plenary too. That was why the Commission was so important. He repeated that the UUP could not take any chances on this subject.

The Prime Minister repeated that we would press on with the decommissioning legislation. Smyth commented that he had been talking to the Chief Whip about the problem of the legislation being confined to Northern Ireland. Trimble echoed this. It would suggest that crime was less important in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister said that he was aware that there were difficulties about extending the legislation. But in any case he did not follow Trimble's logic. Trimble explained that the amnesty would make investigation of past crimes in Northern Ireland more difficult, while the same would not apply in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister suggested that he might talk to the Home Secretary about all this.

Trimble said that he hoped the issues of ceasefire conditions and decommissioning could be sorted out very quickly. The UUP had set themselves an informal deadline of the end of the year. There needed to be progress in the talks before then if the UUP position was to be defensible against Paisley and MacCartney. Otherwise they would make hay in the run-up to the general election. Trimble was prepared to take some criticism if progress was being made, but not otherwise. The next couple of months were therefore crucial. If there was no progress the talks would need to be killed (although the UUP would not want to kill them) or wound down to an extremely low level.

The Prime Minister said that he did not want to rush into a reply to Hume, for fear of seeming to "negotiate" with him as if Lisburn had not happened. Trimble said that he could get through next week all right, but it would need to be sorted out the week after at the latest. He suggested that the issue of ceasefire conditions and decommissioning should be dealt with by the tabling of a Government paper in the talks. The Prime Minister said that we were coming to a similar conclusion. On timing, he thought we would be able to meet Trimble's requirements.

Cullen

The Prime Minister asked whether the fact that the legislation flowing from the Cullen Report would not automatically apply to Northern Ireland would be a problem. Trimble said that it certainly would. The position was unclear and needed to be sorted out. There would be a particular concern about

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safety in schools, following some nasty recent incidents. He hoped that the legislation could all be taken through together. Otherwise Northern Ireland might have to wait three or four years, which would be most unsatisfactory.

Press handling

Trimble said that he would say as little as possible. He would describe the meeting as part of ongoing consultations. The position in the talks and the situation following the Lisburn bombs had been discussed. These discussions would continue. The Prime Minister said that this would be entirely satisfactory. (Trimble did in fact speak on these lines to the press afterwards in Downing Street).

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Sir John Kerr in Washington (by fax). I am also copying this letter to Ken Sutton (Home Office).

John Holmes

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.
Northern Ireland Office

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