

PRIME MINISTER



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I mentioned this to you
at the time, as Cranborne
briefed me orally, but you
may like to glance.

I saw Trimble on Monday morning (16 September 1996) at his request.

The substance of our talk will, I suspect, not be a surprise to you. For the first time he agreed I could report it in full. He made the following points:

- He felt SF was in the process of becoming, electorally, the strongest nationalist party in the Province. He blames our policy for this. ✓
- He is anxious to proceed to the substance of talks before PIRA/SF declares a ceasefire. Nevertheless he still wants an agreement from PIRA/SF that they will surrender a significant token amount of weapons in exchange for a specific but unspecified agreement on a political issue within days of entering into talks. Otherwise he is not disposed to enter into substantive talks. ✓
- In the negotiations he still feels priority should be given to strands 2 & 3 issues. ("Strand 1? Been there, done that"). ✓
- He sees some community of interest with Mallon & Hendron. Their discussions were not specific, but the tone was constructive. ✓
- He is worried about the DUP and McCartney. He thinks both of them want to "ruin the talks". In view of this if the talks dragged on into next year he needed to be able to point to some results as a reason for continuing. He thought some proposals for a revamped NI Grand Committee and some progress with Dublin on Articles 2 and 3 of the Republican constitution might be a fig leaf enough. ✓
- He said his relations with his own party were good. [I was not convinced] ✓
- He said he was seeing the House of Commons Chief Whip to explain that Cecil Walker might be deselected in Belfast North. If that happened Walker would probably stand as an independent. This would split the Unionist vote still further unless Cecil Walker could be dissuaded. [Other opinions in the province suggest that Cecil Walker may survive any attempt at deselection.] ✓

- He and all his colleagues were most concerned about BSE and he hoped to lobby you shortly on the subject.

Now done.

I found Trimble in rather an anxious mood. His tone was conciliatory. My impression is that he fears he might be losing ground to the DUP and McCartney and that some of his own people were all too aware of this.

CRANBORNE
20 September 1996