

File 1412

Thanks - 7 copies

From: John Holmes
Date: 13 February 1997

PRIME MINISTER

*to Paddy / 10.00 pm
13.2*

TRIMBLE

I am not sure whether Paddy Mayhew will be in touch with you later this evening, but it may be helpful if I record what happened between him and Trimble anyway, on the basis of a briefing from his Private Secretary.

Trimble was accompanied by Taylor, and it was a good and (by NIO standards) friendly meeting, with no rancour. Paddy told Trimble that the Empey paper was not off the table as far as we were concerned, although we had withdrawn our own earlier paper which attempted to combine elements of it with points on decommissioning. Paddy encouraged Trimble to discuss his paper with Seamus Mallon, to whom he had apparently already sent a copy, and with George Mitchell. Trimble did not dissent from any of this but spent some time stressing the need for wholesale change in local government in Northern Ireland.

There was agreement that the talks themselves still seemed to be going nowhere. But Trimble was not too apocalyptic. (As Paddy said this morning, there has been a little bit of an upturn in the atmosphere in the last few days, with the SDLP, UUP and Alliance beginning to work together more.)

On the Grand Committee, Paddy explained that we would be moving forward soon, without waiting for consensus. He added that we would be happy to reduce the number of non Northern Ireland members. Infuriatingly, Trimble did not seem too worried about this, and said that it was more important that any non Northern Ireland members had a genuine interest in the Province. Trimble's

- 2 -

main priority was to be able to debate and vote on some items of legislation in the Committee, along the lines of the Scottish Standing Committee. Paddy undertook to look at this again.

On BSE, Trimble wanted to know more details of the Certified Herd Scheme, and whether it contained any regional element for Northern Ireland. Paddy fudged this.

Trimble also raised the electricity interconnector, as predicted. Paddy made clear that he supported the UUP case, that he had discussed it with you, and that you had shown some sympathy too. He implied that this was going in the right direction, but added that it had to be seen to be a proper, rational decision. Trimble took the point.

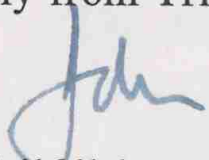
Otherwise there was some discussion of a minor issue about possible derating of village shops in Northern Ireland, to match the position in the rest of the UK. This is an area where we should be able to satisfy the UUP. Trimble was also concerned about the proposed visit by Bruton to Northern Ireland, to ensure that the proper protocol was being followed.

Comment

By this account, the meeting seems to have gone well. But there is a notorious variance between NIO accounts of their meetings with Trimble, and Trimble's own accounts. We may need to aim off for this. But there is nothing here to suggest that Cranborne's assessment, following his own meeting with Trimble this morning, was wrong.

I also attach a reply from Trimble to your letter to him.

JOHN HOLMES



\\ds1\garden\$\docs\foreign\trimble2 kk.doc