

CONFIDENTIAL - PERSONAL**From : Alex Allan**
Date : 14 January 1997*See end*
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PRIME MINISTER**cc : John Holmes****CRANBORNE AND TRIMBLE**

Lord Cranborne gave me a debrief on his talks on Saturday with Trimble.
Separately, Trimble rang me asking for a meeting with you later this week. ✓

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Cranborne's initial pitch had been to ask what good Trimble saw in ending the present Parliamentary position, where the UUP had considerable influence.

Trimble said he wanted an excuse for the talks to continue. He might have given you the impression that he wanted them brought to a speedy end, but that was not his position. One option he floated was something based on what had happened during the Lib/Lab pact, when Liberal front-benchers had "shadowed" Labour Ministers, with frequent meetings to discuss policy proposals. Trimble thought this could be translated into the circumstances of Northern Ireland by having nominated representatives from each of the main ✓

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Northern Ireland parties act together to "shadow" individual Northern Ireland Ministers. Cranborne pressed him on what this meant. Trimble initially seemed to want a system whereby the "shadows" worked virtually cheek by jowl with Ministers, but when Cranborne expressed incredulity Trimble retreated to something more like a briefing once a week. He also wanted to tie this into the Forum in some way, so that the "shadows" might be nominated from the Forum and might report back to the Forum. This would give people practice in devolved government. Something like this would give him enough to justify keeping the talks going.

Trimble indicated to Cranborne that he would approach Paddy Mayhew and float these ideas with him. So far as I can discover, he has not yet done so. But this no doubt lies behind his phone call requesting a meeting with you.

I have not discussed this with the NIO yet. The idea of formal "shadows" having some say in decisions, and based on the Lib/Lab pact is a non-starter. But a minimalist option whereby each Northern Ireland Minister regularly briefed a nominated group of representatives from the main parties (eg on BSE) does not seem impossible—indeed it is an extension of what already happens when you see the party leaders on education or BSE. John will be more expert than me on whether a link with the Forum is practicable or would simply alienate other parties.

Trimble also raised the question of getting a move-on with reform of the Grand Committee, including its membership (where, apparently, Paddy Mayhew wants to stick to the status quo).

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Cranborne's conclusion was that, provided the UUP could be given some scraps, they would have no wish to bring the Government down—though they would maintain their public line that they would consider each issue on its merits. He also thought they would be willing to keep the talks going provided something could be done to keep Trimble in play discussing his ideas.

In terms of action:

Yes i. shall we fix up a session for Cranborne to debrief you himself?

ii. are you willing to see Trimble this week, as he requested?

*Pushed out week -
cd. do this week*
Sometime on Thursday after Questions would be best.

Yes iii. shall John or I speak to Ancram or the NIO to find out if Trimble has been pressing similar lines with them?

AG
ALEX ALLAN

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