

14. May. 1997 13:16

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 5178 P. 2/5

CONFIDENTIAL

From: PS/Secretary of State
6 May 1997

AMENDED VERSION
(para 6)

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Paul Murphy (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas (B&L)
Mr Steele
Mr Leach
Mr Stephens
Mr Watkins
Mr Maccabe
Mr Brooker
Mr Warner
Mr Holmes

Mr Hill

MEETING WITH DAVID TRIMBLE MP

The Secretary of State had her first meeting with a Northern Ireland political leader yesterday when she met David Trimble in Hillsborough Castle. Mr Thomas and Mr Stephens were also present.

Summary

2. Mr Trimble was in relaxed form. He was willing to come back into talks in June, but wanted to avoid the sterility of the last session by injecting a new impetus. He saw no likelihood of PIRA moving away from violence, but would talk to Sinn Fein if there was a proper ceasefire and a renunciation of violence. He was not so relaxed that he did not, on two occasions, point an accusing finger at officials, at one stage suggesting that Mr Thomas was "the villain of the peace".

Talks - entry of Sinn Fein

3. There was a useful exchange on the talks. Mr Trimble said that he would be there on 3 June, but the key issue was whether the Irish and John Hume would continue in the talks without Sinn Fein, as they had given a higher priority to getting them in than to obtaining agreement in the talks thus far. Hume had invested so much time and effort in Adams, despite the acrimony of the election campaign, and he suspected that the liaison would

CONFIDENTIAL

sds/WKL2

✓ JP
PB
Prell

file
(in place of
original version)

John
14/5

14. May. 1997 13:16

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 5178 P. 3/5

CONFIDENTIAL

resume. Mr Trimble then took the Secretary of State to task for saying there needed to be "some sort of ceasefire", which to him meant any sort of ceasefire would do.

The Secretary of State said she had clarified that comment by saying that any ceasefire had to be accompanied by words and deeds and for all the circumstances at the time to be taken into account. Mr Trimble responded that there was no likelihood of PIRA moving from violence in the near future; he thought some of them may be inclined to that view but basically they wanted to get into talks and still retain the option to use violence. He was emphatic that the UUP were not going to talk to Mr Adams in present circumstances.

4. The Secretary of State said she wanted to see inclusive talks, but there had to be a ceasefire in word and deed. Mr Trimble said that was fine as far as it went but it did not mean a renunciation of violence. Asked by Mr Thomas if he would be in the talks if there was a credible ceasefire and a renunciation of violence, Mr Trimble said that it was not just a matter of convincing the UUP but the "people out there" had to be satisfied also that it was for good. He was emphatic that there was no benign transition taking place within the Republican movement at the moment. In that context, the Irish and John Hume were always wishful thinkers and wanted the terms of entry watered down.

5. Mr Trimble bemoaned the fact that the talks had been stuck for months and had become something of a farce. He agreed with Mr Thomas that, while there was an agreed agenda and now that decommissioning was on the table, it would be difficult to get it off, and so agreement was needed. However, one or more of the parties had to change their position. He thought there was an opportunity, given the fact that the Irish elections were likely to be on 6 June and there was probably more than a month to reach an assessment of the way forward. To him, going back to exactly the same positions would only get everything bogged down again.

6. Sketching a history of the talks, he said the UUP had put a lot of work into them in September and October last year, particularly on resolving decommissioning. The Alliance Party had swung round to the UUP position and, in a meeting with the then Prime Minister and Secretary of State, the Government said they were going to move to the Alliance position, but this never happened because of opposition from the Irish and John Hume. In his view, the only way there would be movement was on the paper the UUP had put forward in October. The talks had no standing in the community and further failure would reinforce

CONFIDENTIAL

sds/WKL2

14. May. 1997 13:17

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 5178 P. 4/5

CONFIDENTIAL

that. Mr Thomas recalled that the UUP had shown some interest in ideas on decommissioning which HMG had canvassed towards the end of the talks. He sensed that Mr Trimble needed some assurance that, if he moved, he would be met from the other side. Likewise Mr Thomas felt that the Irish side might consider moving if they felt it would be reciprocated by the UUP. A bridge might be built from both sides. Mr Trimble did not dismiss this altogether but said he was not prepared to go into talks unless he had an assurance that Sinn Fein would not be parachuted in on unacceptable terms. The 28 November statement had used slippery language and, as it was not accompanied by any private assurances to him, it effectively dropped him in it! He thought Adams, and probably John Hume, wanted the Irish Government engaged in a process with HMG and with the unionists outside. To his mind, it was better to stay inside and keep Sinn Fein out.

7. Significantly, Mr Trimble accepted that, if there was a ceasefire, with words and deeds and the right circumstances then there would be "no problem" about talking to Sinn Fein. Answering a point from Mr Stephens about whether Sinn Fein could come in, decommissioning debated and be subject to the sufficient consensus rule, Mr Trimble said that a better situation would be to have a trigger mechanism at an earlier stage so that decommissioning was addressed before the invitation was issued. He said Mr Bruton was quoted as saying something to that effect in the 'Irish Times'.

Confidence building measures

8. Moving on to confidence building measures, Mr Trimble said that these were all considered to be exclusively nationalist. The Secretary of State therefore had an early credibility problem in Northern Ireland and it was deepening. For instance, referring to the reform of the RUC was very damaging unless the terms were defined. The Secretary of State said there was nothing proposed that the RUC was not happy with but took the point that the message needed to be put across. She thought that an article for the 'Newsletter' on confidence building measures might be helpful. Mr Trimble urged the Secretary of State to clarify this quickly. The Secretary of State also said that movement on the ECHR would benefit both communities; on parades, while there would be statutory powers for the Commission, she had underlined the right to march.

CONFIDENTIAL

sds/WKL2

14. May. 1997 13:17

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 5178 P. 5/5

CONFIDENTIAL

9. The ECHR, Mr Trimble said, was not a problem. However, another area which was very poor at the moment was the whole field of fair employment. He gave as an example the UUP attempt to appoint someone to their headquarters but, despite having spent several thousand pounds on consultants, it had proved impossible to do this and retain the requirement for someone with a political interest in unionism. The Secretary of State asked for more of the background to this.

Parades

10. Finally, on parades, Mr Trimble said things were looking very bad and people were squaring up for a fight. He was dismissive of most of the members of the Parades Commission. He thought a head of steam would build up on Drumcree and had information that nationalists intended to block the road, though he was not sure just how firm that would be - it all depended on PIRA.

Elections

11. Mr Trimble predicted that the UUP would poll less in the local elections than in the recent Parliamentary elections - dropping down to 28/29% because there was a wider spread of DUP candidates. He thought the UUP should have won East Belfast (but for the Alderdice factor) and North Down (if he had had a stronger candidate).

Ken Lindsay

W K LINDSAY
PS/Secretary of State

CONFIDENTIAL

sds/WKL2