

CONFIDENTIAL

*File
John 19/5.*

From: John Holmes
Date: 16 May 1997

PRIME MINISTER

cc: JONATHAN POWELL
ALASTAIR CAMPBELL

NORTHERN IRELAND

On returning to London, the reactions to the speech still seem broadly okay, although the Sinn Fein talks element is now firmly in the lead. I attach interviews with Hume, Trimble and Paisley to give you a bit more of the flavour if you want.

I spoke to Trimble to thank him for his reactions. He said he thought the balance of the speech was about right, but there was obviously concern about where the talks with Sinn Fein would lead. He would want to come and see you in a week or two to talk about this. I was non-committal.

I have also spoken to Hume. He said he was telling Sinn Fein not to get hung up on the Unionist reassurances but to look at the speech as a whole. Adams had told him they would be looking for a very early meeting and would want to know the Government's view on the 10 October statement (the principles, not the words).

You are seeing Alderdice and McCartney on Monday for half an hour each. You are well enough steeped in the issues after today to need no briefing. You will know both of them. Alderdice has become very pessimistic about the prospects over the last year or so and was particularly frustrated by the lack of progress in the talks, for which he blamed Trimble above all. He is hesitant about getting Sinn Fein in. McCartney's agenda is hardline Unionism, with a clever face. His

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

approach is entirely destructive in effect. He has nothing positive to offer. But he may ask some hard questions, not least about the Loyalist ceasefire.

As you may have heard today in Northern Ireland, it is now pretty clear that Adams and McGuinness will turn up in Westminster on Monday and seek access to the House of Commons. Under the Speaker's ruling, they are not denied the facilities of Parliament until the end of the Debate on the Queen's Speech, ie 10 pm on Tuesday. They could after all be coming to swear the oath, in theory. The likelihood is that they will be allowed in, at least to talk to House officials, and may be able to wander around the precincts. They could even go into the Chamber, although I do not think they could speak.

This is all very unsatisfactory, but trying to keep them out, and going back on what the Speaker said, is probably worse and more of a propaganda gift to Sinn Fein. In any case, this is still a matter for the Speaker, not for the Government. I wondered about warning them off, saying we would be less ready to talk to them if they played silly games at Westminster. But I doubt we would get anywhere useful, and could end up looking silly ourselves.

JOHN HOLMES



CONFIDENTIAL