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From the Private Secretary

19 June 1997

Dear Ken,

**TELEPHONE CALL WITH DAVID TRIMBLE, 19 JUNE 1997**

The Prime Minister spoke to Trimble by telephone early this afternoon. Trimble was on a car phone in New York.

The Prime Minister said that the murders in Lurgan earlier this week had been very depressing. They were doubly appalling because, in talking to Sinn Fein, we had given them every single point of clarification we could. We had even given them a timescale and set it all out for them clearly last Friday. Lurgan had been the response.

The Prime Minister continued that he had seen John Hume earlier that day. He had told him that, unless something dramatic changed, the need now was to build towards a settlement from the centre. Of course, it was not wise to say that Sinn Fein could never enter the talks. But they had not responded in good faith to the clarifications we had given. He would want to talk to Trimble on Tuesday, when he got back from Denver, to see how matters should be taken forward. He wanted to do so in a way which put maximum pressure on Sinn Fein and carried public opinion with us to the maximum extent possible. He had little doubt that the Americans would support us, although it was difficult to be sure what attitude the new Irish government would take.

Trimble interrupted to say that it was helpful that the Prime Minister would be seeing Clinton in Denver. The Prime Minister commented that he had already spoken at some length on the telephone to Clinton. This was part of tying in US opinion. It was also why he had wanted to go the extra mile in terms of clarification for Sinn Fein. He was determined that they should have no excuse. His impression now was that Clinton was very shocked by what had happened on Monday. In any case, he wanted to try to move things on rapidly.

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Trimble confirmed that he would be available to see the Prime Minister on Tuesday. He commented that the key was to tie Hume and the Irish government down to moving on in the absence of Sinn Fein. The Prime Minister asked Trimble meanwhile to say nothing publicly and to keep between the two of them how he wanted to take things forward. He would probably want to make a statement in the House of Commons next week. Of course, he would not say and could not say that Sinn Fein were out of the process for ever. The possibility of them coming in would always be there, if they did the right things. But he would make clear his determination to go on whether they were there or not. The Government had gone as far as they possibly could in what they had said to Sinn Fein, and could not go any further. Hume and the Irish government needed to be fully persuaded that, unless there was a dramatic change in the situation, the settlement process would have to go on without Sinn Fein. Meanwhile his instinct was to give a date for the conclusion of the talks and indeed for a settlement, for example May 1998. If Sinn Fein were not in the talks, decommissioning would not of course be such a problem.

Trimble agreed enthusiastically to the last point. The Prime Minister repeated that he could not say that Sinn Fein would never come in. That was in their hands. But we could do no more to get them in. Trimble agreed. The need was to find a formula to get things moving.

The Prime Minister concluded with another warning that Trimble should not say anything publicly, particularly when things were at such a delicate stage with John Hume. He had not discussed this with others. Trimble said that he would indeed keep quiet. It was helpful that he would be able to say truthfully that he had been out of touch in New York.

Comment

This conversation should serve to keep Trimble content and tied in for the moment. The Prime Minister's view is that the *Irish Times* piece of this morning about the aide memoire and the six week timescale is not unhelpful. The way it is set out suits us reasonably well and, if knowledge seeps out slowly in this way, it may even be helpful by letting all concerned adjust to it. Nevertheless he accepts that we cannot say nothing. He would therefore like Dr. Mowlam to put an article in the press, probably on Saturday morning, setting out our approach, and in particular why we responded so angrily to Monday's events. It should make clear that we had given written clarification to Sinn Fein, even including a possible timescale for their entry - hence our outrage at the murders a few days

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later. Much of the article could follow the lines of the draft statement you saw yesterday, but it should be less specific on the aide memoire and what was in it. It should make clear our determination to press on with substantive political talks as soon as possible, with or without Sinn Fein.

Meanwhile, the next step is to see what Hume comes back with from Adams. This is likely to be positive-sounding but unsatisfactory. The Prime Minister's response to Hume, to pass on to Adams, will be that he has gone as far as he can, and can go no further. It is time for Sinn Fein to make its mind up. Whatever they do, the Government will be pressing ahead with substantive talks, and will expect John Hume to be with us.

The Prime Minister's underlying view is that, while we are not withdrawing what was said in the aide memoire, and are not resiling from the timescale suggested, what is important now is not so much this timescale, but genuine clarity about Sinn Fein's intentions. The ball is firmly in Sinn Fein's court. They have a lot to say and do to persuade us that they are ready to abandon violence for good. The Prime Minister is not prepared for them to play tactical games, or to string us along, although he recognises their skill in trying to do just that.

Depending on developments, the Prime Minister might make a statement to the House next Wednesday.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

*Yours are*  
*John*

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.

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