

CONFIDENTIAL**PRIME MINISTER****NORTHERN IRELAND**

From: John Holmes
Date: 3 September 1997

cc: Jonathan Powell

I attach a letter from Paul Murphy's office reporting on his discussions with Trimble yesterday. It illustrates well the difficulties of dealing with Trimble, since he is seeking to move the goalposts in various ways, not least on consent. Several interesting points emerge:

- (i) on consent, Trimble is looking for words reaffirming the principle of "sufficient consensus" as well as reaffirmation of the principle itself. There is a hint that if he gets what he wants on this and decommissioning, he may be able to agree to leave our decommissioning proposals formally undecided as long as we implement them anyway;
- (ii) the postponement of the UUP Executive Committee meeting may entail a short delay in the beginning of substantive talks (not disastrous in my view);
- (iii) Murphy is proposing a new text to put to the Irish, behind his letter.

We are still awaiting Irish reactions to our initial text (also attached) for comparison. I do not think we can go back to them with any kind of new text until we have seen this reaction. I am also not convinced that the new NIO draft, in their usual gobbledegook, will cut much ice. But there may be points in it we can incorporate in any new version we put to the Irish following their response.

You may want to have a word about this in the morning.

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