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**SUBJECT
MASTER**

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(faxed to all)

From the Principal Private Secretary

10 September 1997

Dear Richard,

MEETING WITH THE UUP, 10 SEPTEMBER

David Trimble, Reg Empey and Jeffrey Donaldson called on the Prime Minister for 75 minutes this morning. Paul Murphy, Jonathan Powell and I were there on our side. The atmosphere was good throughout, no doubt helped by the fact that the meeting took place in the garden.

The Prime Minister said that the moment of decision had arrived. He had been looking again at the ideas to help the UUP stay in the talks. Leaving aside the proposed confidence-building measures, he saw three areas where the UUP needed movement: consent, sufficient consensus (which had recently gone up the agenda), and decommissioning, particularly the idea of decommissioning during negotiations. He believed he could persuade the Irish to move on these things, despite the difficulties they had, as long as this was on the basis that it would be enough for the UUP to stay in the talks. Trimble agreed that these were the key areas, and said that movement on them would probably be enough, but there was a problem about timescale. The meeting on Saturday would not in fact be crucial. The Prime Minister commented that he believed he could tie up the wording today or tomorrow with the Irish if he had to. He thought it was best for the UUP that changes were represented as concessions to them, and presented quickly.

Empey commented that they were still being ambushed by developments, for example the overnight story about US deportations. Were there any more such landmines in store? For example, there were Republican prisoner issues under consideration. The Loyalists were already flying distress signals. The Prime Minister said no further surprises were intended. The deportations were in any case nothing to do with us. His aim was to present sufficient good things for the UUP in the next few days to be meaningful.

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Trimble agreed that positive steps were needed in the next few days, but the underlying problem was the unease in the Unionist community caused by Republican triumphalism. Republican talking-up of their position undermined the Unionists and brought nearer the likelihood that Loyalist paramilitaries, not necessarily the traditional ones, would take to arms again.

The Prime Minister agreed that there was a problem. But it was important to recognise that Sinn Fein public triumphalism was part of the debate going on in Sinn Fein – the leadership had to show that they were getting something for the steps they were taking. At the end of the day, the Republicans would have the bigger problem, in that the Union would still be there. The key to the present situation was good presentation of the steps taken by the Government. It should be clear that they had been secured by the UUP, not just tossed out from the Government. We should agree what was going to be said, and then announce it at the right moment. Choreography was very important. Alastair Campbell would liaise closely with the UUP about this.

Trimble turned to the Independent Commission on Decommissioning, and asked where things stood. He commented that, of the checklist of decommissioning steps of 16 July, only two had actually been completed. Paul Murphy explained that, as the UUP knew, we had lined up three members for the Commission, but were held up by the dispute over chairmanship. Mitchell was unfortunately resistant to the idea that he should in some way appear to be de Chastelain's deputy. Trimble said that the Irish resistance to de Chastelain doing both the Independent Commission and Strand 2 was unreasonable, and contrary to previous understandings.

Empey said that Mitchell did not need to be designated as deputy. Paul Murphy suggested that de Chastelain could remain as Chairman of Strand 2 while the Finn took over chairmanship of the Independent Commission. Trimble said that de Chastelain knew the background, and would take the job seriously. The other proposed members of the Commission might be fine, but they were unknown quantities.

Paul Murphy asked whether the UUP would prefer de Chastelain as Chairman of Strand 2 or as Chairman of the Independent Commission. Trimble said that the UUP wanted him to be both, and did not see why this was not possible. The Prime Minister raised again the idea of joint chairmanship, and said that he would telephone Mitchell to see if he could sort out some kind of arrangement.

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The Prime Minister returned to consent. He thought he could get the Irish to agree that consent should be a guiding principle in the negotiations. Trimble said that this had to have practical consequences for the negotiations. It was not acceptable to have papers from the two Governments thrown down on the table, and to be told that they were not amendable. This practice had to end. Donaldson added that consent was not just about the constitutional guarantee, but about the way the process worked. A take-it-or-leave-it approach was not acceptable. Empey went back to Dr. Mowlam's recent comments about consent. They smacked of the McNamara approach, under which everything could be settled without consent except the final status of Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister said that it sounded as if it would be useful to agree some language with the Irish on sufficient consensus too. He could also write an article in which he would make our adherence to the principle of consent absolutely clear. Trimble said that both these would be welcome. The people of Northern Ireland needed high-level reassurance that the principle of consent was not being got at.

Empey went back to his comments at the previous meeting about the statement of the previous Government that they had no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland. The Irish Government were making clear their Republican views, while the British Government were saying nothing. Was it going to be like this throughout the negotiations? Would the British Government be paralysed unless it had the agreement of the Irish Government? The Prime Minister said that he did not feel at all paralysed. He would make clear that he valued the Union and Northern Ireland within the Union. It would not be sensible to denounce the statement about no selfish interest, but he could change the tone.

The Prime Minister turned to decommissioning. He thought the Irish might agree to wording making clear that, while decommissioning could not be forced, and there could be no absolute obligation, nevertheless the two Governments would like to see decommissioning during the course of the negotiations. Trimble said this would be good. He accepted that there were points beyond which the Irish would not go, but he hoped it would be possible to add that decommissioning during negotiations would create the necessary confidence for the success of the negotiations. The Prime Minister said that he would try to achieve a phrase on these lines, and also wanted to see something about all the parties being ready to negotiate in good faith on this basis.

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The Prime Minister turned to confidence-building measures, where he had difficulty in understanding clearly what was needed. Trimble said that the NIO were doing nothing in response to their requests. Paul Murphy said that it obviously took time to look properly at some of the requests the UUP had made, for example on education. Empey commented that the perception at street level was that the Provisionals got everything they wanted, while the Unionists never scored a single point. There were things which could be done easily, for example on the local government side. The Unionists needed to get a few points on the board.

The Prime Minister said that we would try to find some practical things to announce in the next day or two to show that we were listening. He understood that the UUP needed practical nuggets to point to, not vague promises about consultation. One of the most important areas seemed to be education and the Coopers and Lybrand report.

Trimble agreed, and explained the background to the problem. It was true that the Coopers and Lybrand report seemed to have been accepted in principle, but there were too many qualifying phrases. The Prime Minister said that we would check urgently whether we could say anything more clearly about our acceptance of the report.

The Prime Minister asked about Maryfield. Trimble said that the Unionist community simply did not know what went on inside Maryfield – how many people were there, and who they were. All they knew was that there was a constant stream of demands on NIO civil servants, not least in public appointments. Clearly the UUP wanted to get rid of Maryfield, because it stemmed from the unacceptable Anglo-Irish agreement. But meanwhile they wanted to know what happened there. Paul Murphy said that there should be no problem in principle with this, but it was not easy to produce an announcement out of the blue. Trimble accepted this.

The Prime Minister turned to local government. Trimble said that all they wanted was to bring Northern Ireland into line with English law (which had changed 10 or 15 years ago), to enable local authorities to develop their own properties or land as they wished. At present they had to operate through a third party. There seemed to be no logic to this. There were no constitutional implications. Indeed, it was a cross-party point. Paul Murphy said we would look at this point urgently.

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The Prime Minister said he thought that we could agree to carry through the RUC reform through legislation, not an Order in Council. We could make this public quickly. This led to a short discussion about how valuable this was, given that most people thought it would be done through legislation anyway, but the conclusion seemed to be that it would be valuable to make it public.

Trimble raised the post-Dunblane Firearms Bill, waving a letter from Jack Straw while in Opposition, assuring him that it would not be extended to Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein wanted the same legislation in Northern Ireland because it would remove the ability of members of the security forces to carry personal protection weapons (PPWs). This was a very important issue. An exemption for PPWs would not be enough because there would have to be places ie pistol clubs where those concerned could practice. The Prime Minister said that Northern Ireland was clearly in a very different situation from the rest of the United Kingdom, and it seemed to him perfectly presentable that, in present circumstances, the legislation should not be extended.

The Prime Minister concluded that there seemed to be a good deal that could be announced quickly. What had to be worked out was a joint strategy about how all this should come out. Some of the smaller announcements could be made immediately. It was more difficult to decide when to make the bigger announcements.

Trimble agreed but explained that, for presentational reasons, the UUP would probably not want to be at the talks on 15 September. The Press would only be there to record Sinn Fein's presence, and the UUP did not want to get mixed up in this. The Prime Minister asked when the UUP would turn up to the talks. In his view it would be best to get all this through on Monday, with the UUP making clear the concessions they had wrested from the two Governments. Empey said that the UUP leadership hoped to be given broad authority from the Executive Committee on Saturday to take the necessary decisions. But there would then need to be time on Monday for consultations with the Loyalists, and bilateral discussions with the British Government, the Independent chairmen and others about how to resolve decommissioning, and how the substantive talks would actually be conducted.

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The Prime Minister repeated that in his view it would be better to have the concessions made overnight on Sunday, and go into the talks on Monday on that basis. Trimble commented that being in was not just a question of yes or no. There were various stages. Empey said that there were various aspects of decommissioning which had to be resolved. How far should it be parked, how far should the parties have committed themselves to it, how should the mechanisms point be dealt with, etc? Trimble said that he could envisage a statement saying that the UUP would be attending the talks, but that would still leave the need for discussions about how the issues were to be resolved.

The Prime Minister said that he could not do the things he had talked about if the UUP were going to join the talks simply to go on talking about decommissioning. We needed a clean situation, not a messy one. Above all, we needed to be clear we had a genuine deal.

Trimble said that it would be a deal, short of acts of God, and the Prime Minister could rely on this. If the Irish had doubts, they could speak to him direct. But the choreography of all this still needed to be sorted out. Empey said that they would need to see the small print of the proposed announcements, since there were always many nuances. NIO officials should not be allowed near the texts.

The Prime Minister went back to the timing of any announcement by the UUP. We had said we would be starting substantive talks on 15 September. Trimble repeated that he was looking for general authority from his executive committee on Saturday, and wanted matters still to be open at that point. There could be some small announcements before then, but the bigger things should come through later. The UUP could then say that, in the light of these concessions, they had decided to stay in the talks. The exact ways and timing of doing this had to be discussed further. The practicalities of how to resolve the address to decommissioning could be resolved on Tuesday or Wednesday in the talks. I commented that there were two ways of dealing with this: UUP acceptance of the paper of the two Governments, or agreement in effect, without explicit approval, that the two Governments should simply get on with it as planned. Trimble commented that the UUP wanted the two Governments to get on with it, but that still left the question of how exactly this was resolved. In a series of other unclear comments, Empey said he thought he could see a way of achieving this through item 2(c) of the agenda. He was however clear that the UUP could not agree the two Governments' paper.

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I raised again the presentational problem of the Government's commitment to start the substantive negotiations on 15 September, come what may. The Prime Minister thought that this need not be a problem, as long as it was clear that the process would be continuing.

Donaldson went back to confidence-building measures. There had been no discussion either of the fair employment review, or of funding for community development. On the latter point, announcement of a fundamental review would have a very positive impact. The point was to ensure that everyone got a fair share. He also wanted to raise the idea of doing something for the victims of violence in Northern Ireland. Relatives of those killed were feeling a lot of pain at present, as they saw concessions apparently being made to Sinn Fein. They could see the likelihood of prisoners being released later in the process. They needed something tangible to help their feelings. It had been suggested in the past that the policemen killed should have their names on the war memorials. Empey commented that the Peace and Reconciliation Fund had specific provision for spending on victims of violence. This had not been used.

The Prime Minister said that he understood the point very clearly, and could see why some people might be feeling hurt: their loved ones appeared to have died in vain. We would certainly look into this. I mentioned the idea which had been put to us of some kind of medal.

The meeting concluded at this point. It was agreed that the less said to the press about the content of the meeting, the better at this point. Jeffrey Donaldson subsequently sent to Jonathan Powell their note of the main points of the meeting, which you have seen by fax. This is reasonably accurate as a broad summary but we would certainly not want to be committed to the details. We will make this clear orally, and probably in writing too.

I should add that I raised with Empey on the way out whether the UUP would be in the talks properly or on a proximity basis. He was clear that the UUP should be either in or out. Proximity talks were a nonsense.

In discussion afterwards, the Prime Minister made clear that, whatever our suspicions of the deal on offer, we must do all we can to make it work. It was agreed that an announcement on acceptance of the Coopers and Lybrand Report should be made as soon as possible, as the first step. This should be followed tomorrow by an announcement about the ability of local government to deal with

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property/land. We might want to make one other smaller announcement too, eg in the Prime Minister's proposed article, before the major announcements on consent and decommissioning. The Prime Minister does not propose to show Trimble the wording on consent and decommissioning, at least at this stage, but will discuss it with him again on the telephone, probably tomorrow. He understands the risk that the UUP will say afterwards that they were misled, but is very anxious not to allow Trimble to get into a negotiation on the text. The phone conversation will be a chance to try to pin down some of the other details also.

Subsequently, the Prime Minister was able to speak to George Mitchell this afternoon (Mitchell was in a plane at the time). The Prime Minister explained the problem over chairmanships. The UUP wanted de Chastelain to do both Strand 2 and the Independent Commission, but had suggested they might accept Senator Mitchell in Strand 2 as long as this was not a formal arrangement. Was there a way of arranging matters such that de Chastelain would have the chairmanship nominally, but Senator Mitchell would do it? Mitchell said that he could accept this as long as he had the authority and the continuity of chairmanship to see it through. He certainly wanted to be helpful.

The Prime Minister suggested that one way round this might be for Mitchell and de Chastelain to be joint chairmen, with the understanding that Mitchell would effectively do the job with the authority he needed. Mitchell accepted this idea, but said it would need to be cleared with de Chastelain. He thought de Chastelain would be able to live with this. The Prime Minister said that we would check this and come back to Mitchell as soon as we could. He was extremely grateful to the Senator for all his help, including over this.

Mitchell added that the Prime Minister should be aware that he would have to travel backwards and forwards to some extent in the coming weeks, as his wife was expecting a baby. The Prime Minister said this was understood.

Your Minister subsequently spoke to de Chastelain, who was entirely happy about this arrangement, and undertook to clear it with Holkeri. We will need to get back to Mitchell to confirm this.

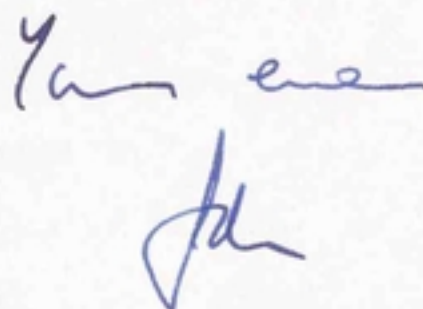
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Finally, I have briefed Paddy Teahon on all the above in some detail. He was surprisingly positive and raised no real difficulties, although he was nervous about what the Prime Minister's article might say. He was obviously pleased that we had not shown Trimble the text, and accepted that a delay for Monday would not be a problem as long as it was clear that a deal was there to start the substantive talks shortly afterwards.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and by fax to Sir John Kerr (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized flourish below it.

JOHN HOLMES

Richard Lemon, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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