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**SUBJECT  
MASTER**

**Filed on:**

to Richard Lemon Esq 11/9/97

From the Principal Private Secretary

11 September 1997

*Dear Richard,*

**CONVERSATION WITH DAVID TRIMBLE, 11 SEPTEMBER 1997**

The Prime Minister spoke to David Trimble on the telephone this afternoon for about ten minutes.

The Prime Minister began by referring to the latest IRA statements in An Phoblact, about the Mitchell principles and decommissioning. He said that the Government would be making a strong response, to spell out that we accepted no distinction between Sinn Fein and the IRA, that we would hold Sinn Fein firmly to the Mitchell principles, and that if the IRA ceasefire broke down, Sinn Fein would obviously be out of the talks. An NIO Minister would be making this clear on the record during the afternoon. The Taoiseach had also put out a strong statement. Trimble welcomed the line the Government would be taking, and agreed that the Taoiseach's statement was good.

The Prime Minister went on to the discussions he and Trimble had had the previous day. The NIO had put out the previous day a statement on the Coopers & Lybrand report. (Trimble said that nothing had appeared in the papers so far, and he believed the statement had not come out until this morning.) This would be followed by a statement on local government freedom to develop land and property. (Trimble made approving noises.) He was planning an article in the press, as discussed, probably in the Newsletter on Saturday morning. This would be the opportunity to make clear our position on consent, as well as making clear for example that RUC reform would be taken forward through a Bill. On firearms, we could make clear that legislation would only be extended to Northern Ireland in an appropriate way, for example excluding personal protection weapons.

Trimble welcomed the proposed article but suggested that the Prime Minister might also give a live interview to Ken Reid of UTV on his main evening news programme. This was the most influential programme for

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Northern Ireland. On RUC reform, he had heard that the draft Order in Council did indicate that there would be a new name for the RUC, namely the Northern Ireland Police Service. This seemed to confirm a story in the press a few days before. The Prime Minister said he would look at the idea of an interview with UTV. On the RUC, he would check the position over the name. Proposing a name change now would certainly not be sensible.

The Prime Minister went on that he had spoken to Mitchell about the chairmanships problem. Mitchell was prepared, albeit reluctantly, to be joint chairman of Strand 2 with de Chastelain, while de Chastelain remained as sole chairman of the independent commission. This was the way out that Trimble himself had proposed. Trimble said "right". The proposal was certainly close to his own.

The Prime Minister continued that, on the decommissioning and consent language, he was still talking to the Irish. He wanted Trimble to know what he wanted to get from them. He then quoted the passage on consent in the agreed text, and the second sentence of the paragraph on sufficient consensus. He saw no reason why the Irish should not be able to agree either of these. Trimble again made approving noises, and agreed that the Irish would be hard put not to agree.

On decommissioning, the Prime Minister quoted the first sentence of paragraph 4 of the agreed text and more or less the whole of the last paragraph. He added that he was not sure he could get the Irish to agree to this, but if he could not, there was a real problem between the two governments. On balance, he thought the Irish would agree. (Trimble did not comment on any of this, but again what noises he made were approving.)

The Prime Minister suggested that we should proceed as follows. We would continue announcing confidence-building measures, as far as we could, and follow this with his article, and perhaps a TV interview. On the assumption that the UUP Executive Committee then gave the UUP leadership the freedom they needed on Saturday, the two governments could make their statement on Sunday, making clear that it was clarification designed for the UUP. That would enable the UUP to make their position clear later in the day.

Trimble said that he was due to appear on the Frost programme that morning. If the story was already running, he would be able to react to it, quote the key bits appropriately and put his own spin on it, thereby creating a

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favourable climate. This would be very helpful. The Prime Minister agreed that this seemed a sensible way forward. We would try to ensure that the BBC news was running the story first thing on Sunday morning.

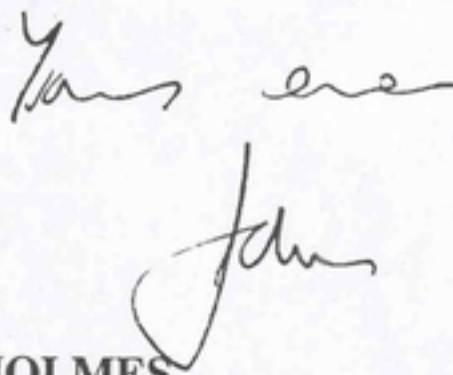
Comment

The conversation concluded at this point, Trimble apparently pleased by what he had heard. The Prime Minister did not explicitly ask Trimble to confirm the overall deal again, but believes that Trimble can be in no doubt about what it is, and could not reasonably back out of it. The Prime Minister was at pains throughout not to get into a detailed discussion with Trimble, and in particular to try to avoid him commenting on the bits of text that he read out. This tactic worked.

We are working on the draft of the Prime Minister's article for the Saturday edition of the Newsletter, and will give further thought to the idea of a UTV interview. We will also need to decide how and when to release the statement by the two governments in time for the Sunday morning news, if this idea is confirmed.

Finally, I would be grateful for an urgent answer on the renaming of the RUC. I suspect Trimble may have misunderstood a reference he had only heard at second hand, but would like to be sure.

I am sending a copy of this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and by fax to Sir John Kerr in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin.



JOHN HOLMES

Richard Lemon, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.

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