

From: John Holmes

Date: 29 July 1997

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH TRIMBLE, 30 JULY

You are meeting Trimble in the House immediately after PMQs tomorrow. The idea was to have a private meeting, not revealed to the press, but the NIO told the Irish, who told the press(!). Trimble will come alone. I will sit in also, if you are happy, but not Mo.

I have told Trimble that you decided in the end not to send him a draft letter, but preferred to talk through the issues with him first. He seemed reasonably happy about this. The pressure on him may in fact have lessened a bit over the last few days. There appear to be at least as many Unionist-related voices calling on him to stay in the talks as there are telling him to leave. And he has begun to get credit more widely for having the courage to stay in. This is all grist to the mill.

But he is still expecting to be offered more to stay in the talks come September, especially if he is to vote in favour of the two Governments' decommissioning proposals. Having voted against already, rather than abstaining, he will have to have something practical to show if he is to change his vote.

The difficulty is that the Irish will not agree to change the proposals themselves and, as you know, will be very difficult to persuade to say anything meaningful on actual decommissioning at all.

- 2 -

You may like to glance again at the forms of words we exchanged with the Irish on decommissioning and on consent. The problem is that even our forms of words are not agreed by the Irish yet, and may not be, but they are likely to fall well short of what Trimble wants. If you run them past him in detail, he is bound to say that he needs more. This will put you in difficulties, since there is bound to be a big questionmark over what you can deliver. You will need to finesse this as best you can by pressing Trimble to reveal his bottom line, without telling him in detail what you have floated with the Irish or what you think you may be able to get out of them. This is not easy!

Otherwise, Trimble said he wanted to talk to you about where the talks process might be going in terms of the shape of a settlement. You may like to glance at the attached summary of the Framework Document, to remind yourself of the main points. As you have heard for yourself, the Document is usually referred to in apocalyptic terms by the Unionists, although there is not too much in there to justify their claim that it is an inevitable slippery slope to a united Ireland.

I suggest your main aim in this part of the conversation should be to reassure Trimble that, in general, HMG will be sympathetic to his overall approach to the negotiations, in terms of preserving the Union, and that you will not agree to negotiate directly with the Nationalist side, without the Unionists present. This is one of their (many) recurring nightmares.

You will also want to get a feel from him of how far the UUP would co-operate in "Plan B" type bilateral/multilateral discussions, if the present talks process either collapsed or was effectively put on one side. It might be easier for him in some ways than having to sit down with Sinn Fein, but he would of course have

- 3 -

to accept that decommissioning in these circumstances would be much harder to take forward, and he would have less control of the process.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN HOLMES

ftrimble mfj