

PRIME MINISTER ✓

*File  
19/9*

**From:** John Holmes  
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**cc** Jonathan Powell  
Alastair Campbell  
Philip Barton

## NORTHERN IRELAND

1. The situation is as follows. Drafting work on the procedural motion continues, with the hope of reaching an agreed text in the next day or so. This could then be voted through at a plenary on Wednesday next week, preferably with minimum debate. That would mark the launch of the three strands.
2. Separately, it has been agreed that a plenary next Tuesday will address the UUP charge that Sinn Fein should be thrown out of the talks because of the IRA statement last week and the Markethill bomb. As I have said, this is perfect cover for Trimble sitting round the table with Sinn Fein for the first time.
3. I have put in the box separately some intelligence on the bomb. Nothing else clearer than that yet. The Irish are busy worrying about what really happened too.
4. You may also like to glance at the statement Trimble made on entering Castle Buildings today. It is very fierce in tone, but the underlying message is that the UUP will be sitting round the table with Sinn Fein. The attachment, setting out the concessions the UUP have won from the Government, is causing some problems. It overstates what the two Governments agreed to; it claims for



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example that de Chastelain has been accepted as Chairman of the Independent Commission, which may come as a surprise to some of the other parties; and it overstates what we have agreed to on other confidence-building measures, including Mo's regular presence at the forum and the firearms legislation. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the UUP are now clearly going to sit down with Sinn Fein. This is a considerable prize.

5. But there is a worry in Belfast and Dublin that Trimble may turn up in plenary on Tuesday, to indict Sinn Fein, but not on Wednesday, to vote on the procedural motion.

The Taoiseach would like to talk to you tomorrow afternoon to touch base - he is worried about the effect of all this on Adams' position.

6. Mo is coming to see you for a few minutes before Cabinet tomorrow, to talk through the next steps. This will be an opportunity to keep her on the right lines, and reassure her of your support. She is particularly worried about the chairmanships problem, where Trimble is refusing to accept that de Chastelain will in practice have little to do with Strand 2. I wonder if we could work on Mitchell to allow de Chastelain to chair a meeting or two early on, and fade out of the picture elegantly thereafter. This would help Trimble presentationally.

You might also mention to Mo somehow the need for caution about getting too close to the Irish. <sup>Temporary retained</sup> Every time she appears on the media, she is standing next to

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Ray Burke. We must work closely with the Irish, but we and they do not have the same agenda/interests in all areas. They are not neutral, and neither are we.

Mo may also mention Bloody Sunday, although I hope she will write to you first. She is still stuck on the idea of an apology and/or a reopening of the Widgery Inquiry in some way, following supposed new evidence from the Irish. She is very keen, for reasons I cannot understand, to do this before the Party Conference, claiming she will be under pressure there otherwise. I am very doubtful about reopening Bloody Sunday at all, since whatever we say or do will raise more questions than it answers. And a move now, at such a delicate time, looks very unwise. Mo wants to take this issue to the Northern Ireland Cabinet Committee. Unless you have an open mind, I suggest you dissuade her. The MOD are of course dead against what she wants to do, although they could probably live with some kind of carefully worded apology/expression of regret.



JOHN HOLMES