

File  
25/9

From: John Holmes  
Date: 23 September 1997

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell  
Alastair Campbell  
Philip Barton

NORTHERN IRELAND

1. A quick sitrep. The UUP duly presented their indictment against Sinn Fein this afternoon. I attach a copy – as you will see it is theatrical and over the top, and singles out Mo and New Labour for particular blame. Trimble took the same line on TV, in best denunciatory mode. After he had made his presentation, he and Donaldson left the talks, but Empey stayed, so the UUP were present throughout. The Sinn Fein response was apparently low-key and full of peace rhetoric, but evasive on the substance.
2. I should add that, although the UUP paper is rather ridiculous, their underlying point, that Sinn Fein are not really signed up to exclusively peaceful means and are still pursuing a twin Armalite/ballot box policy, is valid. What they fail to understand, or at least appear to, is the value of either drawing Sinn Fein away from this policy definitively or ultimately exposing their inability to detach themselves from violence for what it is.
3. The two governments will give their judgment tomorrow on the charges against Sinn Fein (as they have to under the procedural rules). I have not yet seen the terms of the judgment, but they will obviously rule against throwing out Sinn Fein. I hope the judgment will nevertheless make clear that Sinn Fein do have some serious questions to answer.



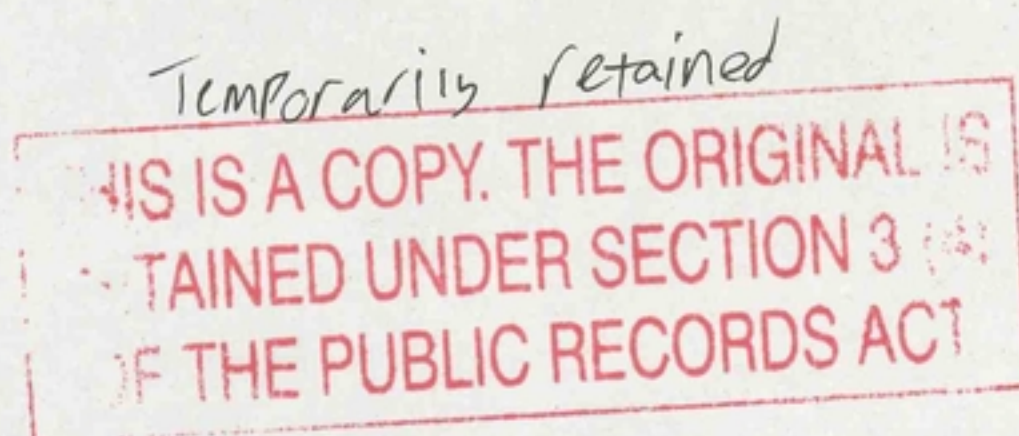
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4. Meanwhile good progress has been made on the procedural motion by Mo and Trimble and wording has now been agreed. As long as the Irish sign up, and can bring along the SDLP (the NIO are confident on both counts), the motion can then be nodded through tomorrow, as Trimble promised.

5. There will then be a period of further wrangling about agenda and format, with the UUP trying to avoid sitting down with Sinn Fein as far as possible. This will be painful and tedious, but should not obscure the basic point that the UUP are now in the talks round the same table as Sinn Fein, and that (if all goes well) the procedural arguments of 15 months are over and the substantive talks finally launched. We should be able to get decent credit for that. No-one thought we would get even this far.



JOHN HOLMES





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