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Filed on:

10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

25 September 1997

Dee Hen,

CONVERSATION WITH DAVID TRIMBLE, 25 SEPTEMBER

1. The Prime Minister spoke briefly to Trimble on the telephone this morning, to register how pleased we were at last night's progress. He said that the priority now was to get to work on the real points of difference between the parties as soon as possible.

2. Trimble said he supposed it was progress. It had been a rather painful process in the end, with the SDLP causing unnecessary problems out of what seemed to have been pique at their lack of profile in recent days. As for the next steps, the Business Committee would no doubt take a week or two to sort out the agenda, which remained important for the UUP. But this did not stop discussion of substance meanwhile. In general, the UUP wanted to get down to the key issues quickly. Dragging it out, with Adams and McGuinness constantly grinning out at the Unionist population from their TV screens, would make the Unionist position more difficult. He wanted rapid progress.

3. The Prime Minister asked about relations with Sinn Fein. What were the prospects for a real dialogue between the two parties? Trimble said actual dialogue was distant, and would be difficult. The UUP could be in the same room as Sinn Fein from time to time, and would have to engage with them at closer quarters in the Business Committee. But they would otherwise be cautious.

4. The Prime Minister returned to his earlier proposal that he and Trimble should meet for a couple of hours privately to ensure they understood each other on the substantive issues. Trimble said this was important for him and he hoped such a meeting would take place in the next couple of weeks or so. If he was confident about where the talks were ultimately going, he could take more risks

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with the "optics" of the process. He will be in Washington roughly from 4-8 October, but hoped something could be fixed soon after his return. The Prime Minister said that he would look at his diary.

Comment

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We are looking for a date for the proposed meeting, and will be in touch.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

*Yours
John*

JOHN HOLMES

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Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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PREM 49 / 117 Account of conversation
with David Trimble - 25/09/97