


From: THE PRIME MINISTER

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21 November 1997*Dear John,*

The Prime Minister is to meet Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson on Monday.
Adam Ingram will attend from here.

The chief objective of the meeting is to develop the DUP's engagement in the pursuit of a settlement (for which there seems some opening, despite their refusal to enter the talks, or any "parallel" process). The more they are talking to HMG about political issues, the less there is scope for making difficulties for Mr Trimble; and the greater the prospect of luring them back toward the process, and of their approaching a referendum on a settlement with something less than outright opposition.

To that end, the Prime Minister may want (i) to reassure the DUP again about the benign nature of the process from the Unionist point of view; and (ii) to invite their views on some of the key themes that we need to address in the talks.


Background

Since its walkout from the Talks on July, the DUP has pursued in public a relentlessly hostile policy towards the Talks, indeed Dr Paisley has spoken of "wrecking" them. Since Sinn Fein's entry to the Talks, there has been a series

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of public meetings to agitate against the process, and warn of its dire consequences for Unionism. There has been consistent sniping at the UUP's participation in the Talks. Some leading members of the party nevertheless hope to engage more constructively in dialogue (Mr Robinson notably), and we have tried to conciliate the party.

Relations warmed following the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr Robinson in Belfast in October. Although most of that meeting was given over to denunciation of the decision to permit Sinn Fein to enter the Talks, Mr Robinson left open various possibilities of closer involvement. He said that the DUP "officer corps" (sc the senior figures apart from Dr Paisley) wanted to be in the Talks, but saw no way they could in present circumstances.


The Secretary of State met Dr Paisley, Mr Robinson and others shortly afterwards. Dr Paisley explained at length that there was no possibility of the DUP being in the Talks in any circumstances, indeed that it was an insult to the party to suggest publicly that they should come in: they had said in successive election manifestos that they would not sit down with Sinn Fein: they wanted nothing to do with the Talks: not even "proximity" or "parallel" talks. But they were willing to give their views at any time on questions presented to them by the Government: and that could include issues that were in fact being discussed in the Talks at the same time. We have kept DUP engaged since through several briefings on current policy issues: though we have not so far talked to them about talks business.

We are approaching the point at which it might be profitable to do so. The DUP agitation against the Talks has continued, but with increasingly less coverage, and little conspicuous success in embarrassing Mr Trimble, though

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fear of the DUP certainly in part underlies UUP unwillingness to engage in Castle Buildings. It is likely that Mr Robinson will see the meeting as an opportunity to contribute to the settlement process, and he may want to establish a more regular basis for doing so.

I attach a summary of points the Prime Minister might make.

Yours ever

John McKervill
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