

CONFIDENTIAL

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

File

From the Principal Private Secretary

4 December 1997

Dear Ken,

HEADS OF AGREEMENT

As discussed, I sent to David Trimble the text which had been faxed to you overnight. He rang me this afternoon to give his initial reactions. He seemed generally not too unhappy. He preferred the second alternative to the first. Otherwise his only major difficulty was still the reference to a North-South "Council of Ministers". He feared, if language like this was tabled in the talks, and people had a month to think about it over Christmas, the expression would somehow be demonised and the UUP would face difficulties. This was very much Jeffrey Donaldson's view.

I asked whether removing "of Ministers" after "Council" would help. He thought it would. It was relevant that there might not be "Ministers" as such in the proposed Northern Ireland devolved arrangements. But he was not sure whether removing "Ministers" would resolve the difficulty altogether.

Trimble went on that he needed to check further with Taylor and Empey, both of whom were abroad today, and would therefore get back to me tomorrow with more definitive views.

As far as confidence-building was concerned, the true answer to the Prime Minister's question was that Unionists wanted an end to the string of concessions to the other side. But they had one thought. Adams would obviously take full advantage of his visit to No.10 to talk to the media in Downing Street afterwards. Could not the Prime Minister, once Adams had gone, go out to the media himself and make some points of his own? He could say for example that if there was any return to violence by the IRA, Sinn Fein would be out of the talks; that he had stressed the importance of the democratic process to Adams; that adherence to the consent principle was fundamental etc. This would help to counter the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

propaganda effect of Adams. I said that we would reflect on this. I could see the point, although the Prime Minister did not normally go into the street after such meetings.

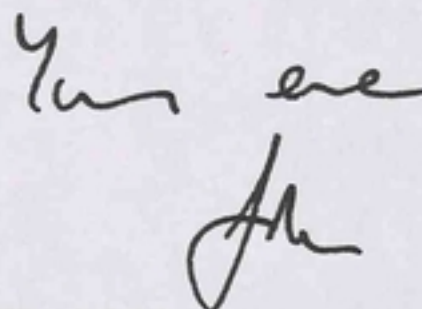
The Prime Minister also spoke briefly to Ahern about Heads of Agreement, when Ahern rang about beef. Ahern said that he would be meeting Trimble again in Belfast on Monday, having spoken to him on the telephone earlier today. The UUP reaction to Andrews' statement had been ballistic, but they seemed to be calming down. The Prime Minister said that he had been working further on a Heads of Agreement text, and had had general discussions with Trimble and Hume. He hoped to show Ahern a text in a day or two. Ahern looked forward to this.

Ahern concluded by saying he appreciated the latest movement on prisoners. He hoped to have the new Irish legislation through by Christmas.

Comment

Trimble's reaction to the latest text sounds relatively hopeful. If we can get definitive UUP views tomorrow, we will then be in a position to show the text to the Irish and the SDLP. The obvious difficulty is how to relate this to Irish promises to produce their own draft in the Liaison Group tomorrow. I have talked to Quentin Thomas about this. Ideally we would float the text already shown to Trimble. In any case, we should work towards it. What we must not do is agree some other text with the Irish which they will then expect to see tabled, either by the two governments or Mitchell. There are real dangers here.

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



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

CONFIDENTIAL