

**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR AHERN: 12 DECEMBER**

**NORTHERN IRELAND: POINTS TO MAKE**

**Meeting with Sinn Fein**

- Took a positive decision to meet Sinn Fein in Downing Street despite reports of dissent within the Republican movement which we have heard, and despite criticism from Unionists and others;
- made clear to Sinn Fein again that I welcome their involvement in the talks and that I always wanted to see inclusive talks;
- emphasised to them that I am acting in good faith, and expect Sinn Fein deal straight with me in return;
- made clear that we want to help them if they are committed to peace - not trying to split the movement (not in our interest to do so either);
- [account of points raised by Sinn Fein and Prime Minister's views on these;]
- hope you will agree that I have made genuine efforts to deal openly with Sinn Fein and to treat them as I treat all other parties;
- I hope too that, if there were to be a return to violence despite all our efforts, you would support the British government's position publicly.

**Heads of Agreement**

- The text which we have received from you looks promising;
- encourage you to show it to the UUP: we think that it is along the lines of what they are likely to acquiesce in;
- I accept that it would be better not to table Heads of Agreement before Christmas;
- had been anxious to do so in order to be able to point to real progress in the talks before Christmas;
- content for us to press ahead in January, to drive the process on then determinedly and to capitalise on the progress which the text represents;
- [here is our text, as discussed with Trimble. Useful to have your views on it. But need to think carefully about presentation in January: Trimble very suspicious of joint texts unless he's carefully consulted;]

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UUP

- Some signs this week that the UUP are beginning to take account of Sinn Fein's position - welcome this - encouraging;
- they will be looking closely at how you respond to Sinn Fein's views and concerns on key issues and Heads of Agreement;
- vital for their confidence in the process that you give them no cause to fear that progress on these is entirely dependent on Sinn Fein's agreement.

#### Co-operation between Ireland and the United Kingdom

- Glad that Ministers of our two Governments have been establishing personal contacts. This supports the good co-operation at official level.

- We have many problems in common, and we should take every opportunity to learn from each other, and to add value to our individual efforts.

- See much scope for co-operation in the use of information technology in education. I hope that we can also use it to establish links between schools in our two countries.

- (Defensive: Irish language training in English schools) I know that David Blunkett will want to look at the whole National Curriculum before he makes individual changes. I understand that there are ways of permitting Irish language teaching in individual schools under the present law. We are very ready to see these used.

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