

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
BELFAST BT4 3SS

Tel. Belfast (01232) 520700

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

5 January 1998

Dear John,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR TRIMBLE AND MR TAYLOR

This afternoon's meeting is public knowledge and is being widely interpreted as an example of the UUP's ability to go one better than the other political parties in Northern Ireland, all of whom will be meeting Dr Mowlam during the course of today to discuss the prospects for political progress in the light of recent security events and concern about the commitment of the loyalist parties.

In practice, however, we expect Trimble and Taylor to concentrate on the points covered in the UUP memorandum of 3 January.

We find the memorandum (and your report of the Prime Minister's conversation with Trimble on 2 January) encouraging, especially as the Irish account of their meeting with the UUP (reported in your letter of 30 December) tallies with it. It supports the view that Trimble is genuinely engaged in an attempt to strike a reasonable deal with constitutional nationalism and ready, within certain parameters, to contemplate meaningful North/South arrangements. His report of the Irish position (mirrored in Teahon's reference to "meaningful North/South bodies") is also encouraging in that it suggests the Irish have a realistic view of what might be attainable in this area.

/LB



There are several difficult issues - constitutional as well as North/South - to sort out before a deal could be struck, but a positive relationship has clearly been established and considerable progress made.

The immediate question is how best to promote further progress towards a general understanding among the key participants - the two Governments, the UUP and the SDLP. It is, however, equally important to ensure that the other parties, especially Sinn Fein and the loyalists, are at least engaged in discussion of these issues as soon as possible and have an opportunity to develop joint ownership of and commitment to whatever understanding emerges.

The attached speaking notes have been drafted on the basis that the Prime Minister will wish to:

- ensure that Mr Trimble understands the status of the text he has discussed with us
- encourage him to pursue his contacts with the Irish (and the SDLP) with the aim of securing agreement on something like the Heads of Agreement text as quickly as possible. [HMG can support and advise both the Irish and the UUP but they are more likely to reach an acceptable agreement in direct negotiation]
- alert him to the need to tie in the other parties before too long.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Grant (FCO), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours ever,

W K LINDSAY

/LB