

13. Nov. 1996

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No. 1699 P. 2/6

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FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
8 November 1996

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PA

① cc PS/Lnd
Pring Lead
(who may be
interested to
see this)

② Baul for
John 13/11

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) -B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Ray - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mr Budd, Cab Office
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Holmes, No 10

L-6
for
21/11

Mr Stephens - B

MEETING WITH DAVID TRIMBLE - 7 NOVEMBER 1996

The Secretary of State met David Trimble in his Office in the House yesterday afternoon at Mr Trimble's request.

Summary

2. This was a good meeting, which touched on Hume/Adams, BSE and the Grand Committee for Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State confirmed the present position on Hume/Adams, said Hume had not been given a text but that such a text would be a restatement of policy; no meetings had taken place with Sinn Fein or the IRA; explained the latest Irish thinking on immediate entry to allow Sinn Fein to sign up to the Mitchell principles. Trimble said that the Talks were not going anywhere because the two Governments were focussing on getting Sinn Fein in; the Government could not wait much longer for Sinn Fein. He wanted to see the present impasse in the talks resolved satisfactorily and agreed to look at the Alliance Party submission

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on decommissioning again. He commented on the promotion of hardliners in PIRA (Brian Keenan); said a ceasefire could well bring an end to the campaign in Northern Ireland but not in GB; thought George Mitchell would be appointed to the US Administration (to be replaced by Martha Pope) - he hoped the State Department would be in the ascendancy in relation to Northern Ireland.

Detail

3. The Secretary of State began by reassuring Mr Trimble on the Government's position on Hume/Adams - words would not be enough, we would also need to look at actions, inactions and all the circumstances to see if they were consistent with a declaration of a ceasefire. The text was a restatement of policy but Hume had not been given this as yet; it would not specify a time, which of course Mr Trimble had not been advocating either, but rather it was important to set out the criteria required. We still had not heard what words would be offered in any ceasefire announcement. From the information we were getting it was difficult to see that there would be a ceasefire.

4. Mr Trimble responded that press sources had told him some hardline people had been promoted to the PAC and mentioned Brian Keenan as one of them. In relation to Hume/Adams, he said that he expected any statement by the Government to be a re-affirmation of policy, though the events since February meant that it was necessary to look at the wider scene. He did not think that the initiative could go on much longer; in his view, the Talks were not going anywhere because of the two Governments focussing on getting Sinn Fein in. He asked if there were questions in the text which we wanted Sinn Fein/IRA to respond to.

5. The Secretary of State said that it was necessary for the Government to know reasonably precisely what the outcome would be before any statement was published. This was the problem at present - there was no clear language. The Government needed to be sure that any ceasefire was for real and not tactical, and whatever time

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was required to verify this would be taken; unless there was some cataclysmic announcement from the PAC then this would remain the case.

6. The Secretary of State referred to current Irish thinking and the proposal to allow Sinn Fein into the Talks at once to sign up to the Mitchell principles after the declaration of a ceasefire. The problem with that was that, under the requirements of paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Groundrules, there needed to be time to make a well-founded judgement. Once they had been invited into the process then it would be very difficult to remove them. He floated the idea of Sinn Fein coming into a process and an occasion being convened where Sinn Fein could come in and sign up to Mitchell.

7. Mr Trimble did not dismiss this but responded that it was awkward; it was like Paisley signing up to Mitchell while not in the same room as the others. Resolving Hume/Adams satisfactorily would be the way of ensuring the Talks continued. He was absolutely clear that there needed to be time after a ceasefire to verify that a change had taken place on their side, and people on the ground could then accept their being included in the Talks. He quoted a Ken Maginnis thesis that the IRA could call a ceasefire at Christmas and say that the "campaign of 25 years in Northern Ireland is now over". Mr Trimble thought this would be a diversionary tactic by PIRA and unacceptable; the Secretary of State agreed.

8. On the decommissioning debate currently ongoing, the Secretary of State said he appreciated the strong objections of the Unionists to the idea of a Committee. He commended the Alliance paper and the idea of having an independent Commission with a wider range of powers than originally envisaged. It would be the Commission which would decide when decommissioning would start and, therefore, the participants would not be in the business of trading guns for progress. Mr Trimble said he had only skimmed the Alliance paper but would read it again more carefully before next week. He said there would need to be a range of understandings with any Commission, just as there needed to be a range of agreements on what followed an IRA ceasefire.

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9. Commenting briefly on the US dimension Mr Trimble suggested that everything he had heard from press sources pointed to Senator Mitchell being appointed to the new Administration. He had heard that the present regime wanted to replace him with Martha Pope. The Secretary of State expressed scepticism at this. Trimble thought that the appointment of Senator Mitchell would be a good thing and hoped the ascendancy of the State Department would follow. He had also heard that Lake had bought the latest Irish scheme (comment: he was probably not referring to the immediate entry scheme unveiled in the Irish text this week but a previous one, perhaps using the Christmas entry formulation).

Grand Committee

10. The Secretary of State referred to his letter of 2³ October to party leaders and to the proposals for possible changes to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee. In addition to these, he said that questions to House of Lords Ministers might also be included. He mentioned the Scottish Grand Committee, which debated second and third readings of certain Bills (decided by the Government) which applied only to Scotland. Northern Ireland had few of it's own Bills, - less than Scotland, and it would be more usual for the Committee to consider a draft Order in Council at the consultative stage.

11. Mr Trimble said the benefits of developing a Grand Committee system were a saving of Parliamentary time - legislation could be debated in the Grand Committee and not on the Floor of the House - and to preserve the integrity of the Northern Ireland Statute Book. He thought it was a good idea for the Committee to sit in Northern Ireland on occasions and for a range of statements to be made to it. The Secretary of State invited him to put his thoughts on paper and then he would consider how best to deal with the range of views received.

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12. The Secretary of State said he was keen to get the ban lifted; if the price was an accelerated cull, then so be it, and he would press for that. This was unpopular with the Scots because of the advanced stage of the NI certified herd scheme. A paper which had been discussed by the Vets Committee was to be amended and sent to Commissioner Fischler and it was hoped that this would be favourably received. It was difficult to know how the Commission would respond but they may press for an accelerated cull throughout the UK. Mr Trimble was interested to hear this, but did not express strong views either way, simply mentioning that the BSE debate next week could be interesting.

Other Issues

13. Finally, Mr Trimble mentioned the question of extending the Local Government and Rating Bill, which was discussed in the House on 6 November, to Northern Ireland. I have asked for separate advice on this. He also complained about Minister's not meeting Forum members but the Secretary of State confirmed that it had been agreed Baroness Denton would meet the Agriculture Committee about BSE.

Signed

W K LINDSAY
Private Secretary