

File

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

SUBJECT
MASTER

Filed on:

Ireland
Pr 22

FAXED

Via Brent to NIO
3/3 NS

by JPO
AC
PB
M Pakenham
P McFadden

From the Principal Private Secretary

31 March 1998

Dee Ken,

CONVERSATION WITH LORD ALDERDICE, 31 MARCH

After Alderdice's office had rung seeking an urgent meeting, the Prime Minister spoke to him on the telephone for just under 10 minutes.

Alderdice said that things were not easy at the Belfast end. Trimble was being difficult with the Irish and the SDLP, not least because he was negotiating with the Prime Minister. He (Alderdice) was concerned that neither the UUP nor the SDLP were being realistic about the practical issues of how a government in Northern Ireland would function. How was a government to be formed? What would we do with a rogue minister? Meanwhile, Trimble was playing lawyers games with Articles 2 and 3, and driving the Irish demented. On policing, if we only set up a Commission, this would simply alarm the Unionists, and give Paisley a stick with which to beat Trimble, since it would be seen as effectively the end of the RUC. Any Commission would need clear and public terms of reference, dealing with specific issues like better use of local liaison committees and more power for local officers. Personally, he also thought it worth considering a joint North/South police force unit able to operate throughout the island, aimed at tackling drugs and terrorism, but with only the officer in his own jurisdiction able to make arrests. He thought this was deliverable from the Unionists, although this frightened the Irish.

The Prime Minister said that he understood his dealing with Trimble might upset others, but he could not make him move without talking to him. Alderdice said that he understood this. But if others like himself did not have the possibility of talking to the Prime Minister direct as well, the Prime Minister was in danger of missing some important points, since he only heard the viewpoints of two frightened sides. On Strand 1, he thought the absence of collective responsibility for ministers in a Northern Ireland government would be a disaster.

CONFIDENTIAL

AS

CONFIDENTIAL

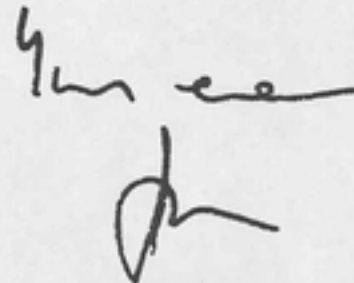
- 2 -

He did not think Trimble had thought this through. Trimble wanted an automatic formula for allocating posts, so that he did not have to say he had voluntarily gone into a coalition with Nationalists. But this formula put the DUP and Sinn Fein into government, and they would try to wreck it. There was no way of controlling them.

The Prime Minister wondered whether some of these things could be left open. Alderdice thought not. There had to be an agreed model, if a settlement was to be achievable. The Prime Minister said that we were thinking of a Liaison Committee to give direction to the Assembly's work. This might develop into a strong body. Alderdice repeated that he was not sure that the UUP and SDLP could work this through themselves, not least since both tended to slip off to see the Prime Minister or Ahern. He would like a meeting with the Prime Minister himself. He had some creative thoughts he could feed in.

The Prime Minister said that he was seeing Ahern on Wednesday evening, and would ensure that Alderdice was given a read-out on Thursday. Meanwhile, he would think about a meeting.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin) - the last two by fax.



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

CONFIDENTIAL