

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

3 June 1996

*Dear Martin,*

### MEETING WITH THE UUP

David Trimble called on the Prime Minister today, accompanied by Geoffrey Donaldson and John Hunter. Sir Patrick Mayhew and Michael Ancram were there on our side. The meeting lasted an hour and three quarters.



Trimble said that the results of the elections were a very mixed bag. The UUP should have got more seats, and their percentage share of the vote was a poor figure. They had done badly in some constituencies where they should not have done. The result in North Belfast was disastrous. There was a danger that Gerry Kelly could be the next MP there. This was partly the fault of the sitting member, Willie Ross, but the NIO were also responsible because of their blatantly discriminatory policy on distribution of financial assistance, both for businesses and for schools. (Trimble was not prepared to listen to any denials - he had no doubt that there was deliberate sectarian distortion).

Trimble went on that the increased vote for Sinn Fein was worrying, (and should worry Dublin in particular). So was the relatively poor position of the UUP versus the DUP, and the SDLP's loss of votes to Sinn Fein. The electoral system had been wrong, and the UUP result had been significantly worsened by Paisley's name featuring on the ballot paper. STV would have been much better.

The Prime Minister said that the IRA/Sinn Fein now faced a difficult decision on a ceasefire. If they decided against, the process would go on without them. Even if they decided in favour, it was now very late. Trimble commented that he had heard that Sinn Fein had recently met British officials (we made clear this was not so), or perhaps Irish officials, and that Adams was talking about offering a time-limited conditional ceasefire. He had also heard that South Armagh and East Tyrone would not agree to a ceasefire. If there was no ceasefire, he agreed that the process should go on without Sinn Fein, but he assumed that the negotiations would still be serious. The Prime Minister



CONFIDENTIAL.

- 2 -

confirmed this, and added that a conditional ceasefire would not be good enough. If there was not a ceasefire, the talks could, of course, run into the sand, but this would not be of our doing.

Trimble suggested that the Forum should meet quickly after the opening of the negotiations, so that Sinn Fein would have to decide whether to turn up to something to which they were invited. Sir Patrick Mayhew said that the chosen location for the Forum would not be ready before 14 June, but he saw no reason why the Forum should not meet then. Trimble welcomed this but criticised the choice of location. He hoped that the Forum could move to Stormont soon. Sir Patrick Mayhew suggested that this would not be the best move from a presentational point of view.

The Prime Minister returned to the question of a ceasefire. His guess was that the IRA was indeed split, and that the only way to avoid an open split was to avoid a new ceasefire. However, if there were a ceasefire, he wanted to confirm that the Government's position on decommissioning had not changed. We remained firm on the need to implement the Mitchell compromise that some decommissioning must take place during the talks, and were clear that the issue could not be sidelined. We were resisting any attempt by the Irish to put it off to the end of the talks. But the question remained of how to achieve decommissioning. We had not reached any agreement with the Irish about this. Our position was that, at the opening plenary, the independent chairman would need to be satisfied that all concerned were ready to meet the condition of the Mitchell compromise. The issue could then be referred to a sub-committee, which could consider it while the wider talks also went on. But there would be a short-term time barrier, perhaps the end of September, before which the sub-committee would need to report back to the plenary on how the parties were honouring the commitment they had made. This was to stop the talks continuing indefinitely while nothing happened on decommissioning. It would then be for the parties to decide whether the issue was being tackled seriously and to take appropriate action if this was not the case.

Trimble asked what happened while this sub-committee was meeting. Sir Patrick Mayhew had given the impression that substantive negotiations could be started before there was any decommissioning. This was too far for the UUP. The Prime Minister said that Sir Patrick Mayhew had said nothing new in his remarks over the weekend. (Sir Patrick handed over a copy of the transcript for Trimble to study.) Trimble repeated that his position was that the talks should not move out of the opening plenary until not only the decommissioning issue had been resolved but also decommissioning had started.

The Prime Minister said that this approach was not in conformity with Mitchell. It was also likely to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. If the UUP were not careful, Sinn Fein would be able to claim that a new pre



CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

condition had been set or that the old position of prior decommissioning had been resurrected. The UUP would be seen as responsible for the failure of the talks. This would be a tragedy. Sinn Fein were in a hole and should be kept there. Trimble said that he did not want to be dragged along in a process where no decommissioning happened but it was difficult to find a way out. There had to be benchmarks before he could agree to move out of plenary. The Prime Minister said that Mitchell's proposal clearly said that decommissioning should take place in parallel with negotiations so that the balance of trust could be maintained. If we moved away from that, we could lose the strong public position we had.

Trimble said that the public would understand that there had to be a clear commitment to decommissioning and an actual start to it. If he was not satisfied about this, the talks would get stuck. He could not go beyond the opening plenary until there was some decommissioning. If he had had any flexibility, the result of the elections had removed it. A period lasting from June to September without actual decommissioning represented the limits of tolerance. He would be accused of being sucked into a process going nowhere. The Prime Minister repeated that, while he could understand Trimble's concern, and indeed shared it, he had to advise against sticking on the principle of staying in the plenary and holding up political talks. Trimble repeated in turn that he had very limited room for manoeuvre. He did not expect Paisley to be there at all. The Prime Minister said again, several times, that the UUP should not get themselves boxed in. If Sinn Fein or the DUP took an extreme position, no-one was surprised. But the UUP was the key to progress, and could afford to take a more responsible view.

Donaldson came back to the September time limit. This seemed rather distant. The Prime Minister said that in practice he expected August to be a dead month. Not much might happen in late July either. In general he expected the talks to get off to a slow start. Trimble agreed with this. 12 July marked the start of the Northern Ireland holiday period.

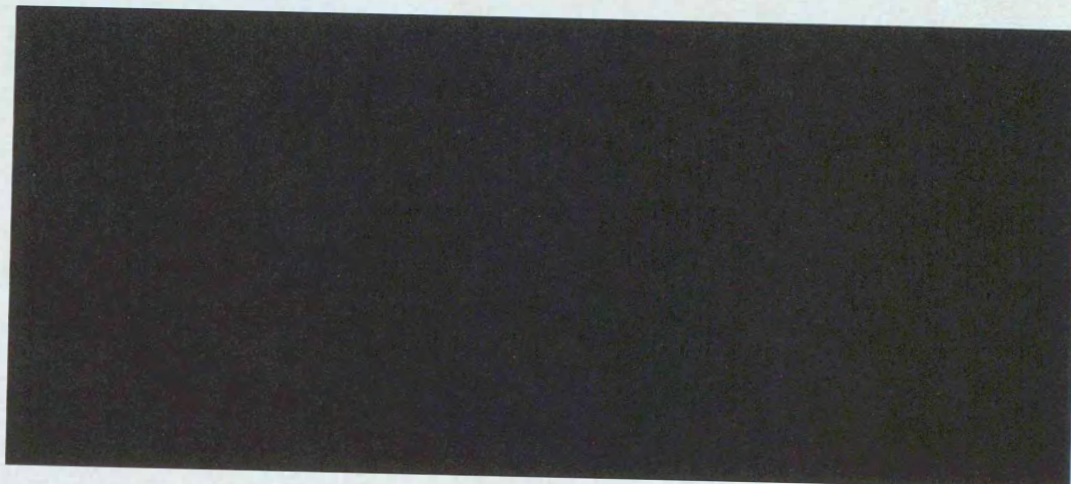
Donaldson asked about the decommissioning legislation. Sir Patrick Mayhew said that a further more detailed draft of British legislation had been prepared. Trimble welcomed this but was concerned about the Irish legislation. Sir Patrick said that he would raise this with Spring the following day. The Prime Minister said that he would also raise it with Bruton. As far as the UK legislation was concerned, it was obviously important to get it through before

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

- 4 -



Trimble went on to say that he had also not agreed to the three-stranded structure for the talks. It was essential for the UUP to be able to take part in discussion of what should replace the Anglo/Irish Agreement. This demand had to be accommodated. Donaldson said that East/West relations were not simply a governmental issue, but concerned the totality of relationships. If the UUP were left out of this vital negotiation, they would find it much more difficult to negotiate in other areas. They did not want a North/South link which stood alone. It must be set in a broader context. The Prime Minister pointed out that this would be very difficult to agree with the Irish. Sir Patrick Mayhew said that the three-stranded structure was now hallowed by time and could not easily be changed. Trimble commented that it had been designed to suit Hume, and left the Unionists permanently behind the game.

The Prime Minister said that his mind was certainly not closed on this issue, but there were great dangers in opening Strand 3. The Irish were bound to demand to be let into Strand 1. Trimble thought that they would not insist on this. The Prime Minister said that he would reflect further. There might be other ways of skinning this particular cat. Meanwhile he suggested that Trimble should discuss it further with NIO Ministers. Trimble said that he was willing to do so but there was a great lack of time before the talks. He had to get his newly elected team together and decide their roles before 10 June.

Trimble asked whether the procedural rules and interim chairman for the Forum had yet been set. Sir Patrick said that the procedural rules were there, and he had some names in mind for the interim chairman, but would be consulting the parties very soon. Trimble asked whether Napier was one of the names on the list. Sir Patrick confirmed that it was. Donaldson asked whether the Forum would meet on one day a week. Sir Patrick said that this was the intention. Trimble said this would not do. There had to be equal time for the negotiations and for the Forum. It could well be that the talks would proceed very slowly. The Forum could then help to give at least the appearance of progress.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

- 5 -

There was then some discussion of what positions might be taken in the Forum by Sinn Fein, if they turned up, and by Paisley and McCartney. Donaldson commented that McCartney wanted to take over from Paisley when the old man disappeared. The Prime Minister wondered whether the extreme views of McCartney and Paisley did not make it easier for the UUP to represent responsible Unionism. Trimble said that this was true if progress was being made. Otherwise, it was too easy to be accused of weakness. One issue he was determined to use in the negotiations was the consent principle. The Provisionals should be made to face up to this.

Trimble asked what would actually happen on 10 June. Sir Patrick Mayhew said that the chairman would call on all the parties to state their commitment to the six Mitchell principles. All would then have to subscribe to a common statement to ensure there was no doubt about their position. Thereafter each delegation could make its broad opening statement. Trimble commented that, if Sinn Fein were at the talks, the UUP could not be in the same room until Sinn Fein had made clear their acceptance of the Mitchell principles. He asked when decommissioning would be tackled. Sir Patrick said that, after the opening statements, the Business Committee could meet to agree the agenda. Then decommissioning would be addressed, through each party having to make clear its commitment to the Mitchell compromise, followed by establishment of the sub-committee.

Trimble said that it was not acceptable for the agenda to be tackled before decommissioning. The 28 February communiqué had been quite specific on this and he would insist on it being respected. Otherwise a walk-out was on the cards. It might be possible for the Business Committee to meet, but not for the agenda to be tackled. The Prime Minister said that the participants would of course be master of what happened in the talks but he understood the point that had been made.

At the end of the meeting, there was some discussion of press handling. Trimble said that he would tell the press that he had been reassured that the British Government was committed to decommissioning during negotiations, and that the issue could not be sidelined, but that nothing else had been agreed. The Prime Minister said that he had no difficulty with what Trimble proposed to say about decommissioning. (Trimble did indeed say this afterwards, as well as telling the press that the Forum would meet on 14 June!)

#### Comment

This was not an easy meeting but not as difficult as might have been expected. Trimble made clear his bottom line on decommissioning and stuck to it, but did not suggest that he would reject our approach outright. On chairmanships, it is clear that he has difficulties in his own party.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

- 6 -

[REDACTED]

In a brief discussion afterwards, it was agreed that Sir Patrick should not seek to make an issue of Trimble's Strand 3 concerns in the meeting with Spring the following day. As far as the order of events at the opening plenary is concerned, thought must be given to how Trimble's point can be met without reopening the whole issue with the Irish. It may be possible to find a way of tackling the agenda and decommissioning in parallel.

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

*Yours sincerely*

*John Holmes*

JOHN HOLMES

Martin Howard, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.