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Daivineach
This report
of interest.
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W. Hume
Mr. Hillin
S.H.

15 February 1995

Mr Sean O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
HQ

Dear Secretary

Meeting with David Trimble MP

I had lunch today with David Trimble. You may recall that we originally scheduled lunch for 1 February, the day of the Times story, but that Trimble opted out.

Our meeting today was open and courteous. Such emotion as Trimble expressed was directed against the British Government, for "getting things wrong", against the IRA, and against paramilitaries in general including "members of Paisley's party". It was noticeable that Trimble made no effort to take me to task or to probe me on our own affairs. At the same time there was a certain effect of distancing in some of his remarks. On leaving the restaurant, I said, "I hope we meet again soon"; before the sentence was out, Trimble was shaking my hand and saying, "we'll see what the future holds".

UUP meeting with the Prime Minister

Trimble, Ross, and Smyth were received yesterday morning at the House of Commons by the Prime Minister, Ancram, John Ward MP, PPS to the Prime Minister [comment: who also attended last week's meeting with the SDLP], and "a notetaker". The meeting took place round a table and lasted ninety minutes.

"Nothing positive" was on offer from the UUP point of view. Trimble said that the letter that has been written to the Prime Minister is even stronger than the statements that have been made in public. The basic point from the Unionists' point of view is that they will not enter into negotiations if there is "nothing on the menu" for them.

Trimble concluded his report of yesterday's meeting by insisting with some emotion that the Framework Document is "done for". He said that it was difficult to see what was the point of the whole exercise.

I said the exercise follows from the Downing Street Declaration and pursues what has been the logic of British Government policy for some years. The interaction of the principles of self-determination and consent is key.

Constitutional change

I went on to ask whether the Prime Minister briefed the UUP on the constitutional part of the Document. Trimble said that nothing of significance was said on this at the meeting. More generally, he suggested that on this issue the Irish Government is engaged in "a tactical manoeuvre".

I said that this would be a false reading of what is happening. From my personal knowledge difficult issues are being addressed seriously. The ideas to be put forward will pose a serious challenge to traditional thinking in much of Nationalist Ireland. This is seen by the Irish Government as part of a wider effort to bring stability to Northern Ireland.

As discussion proceeded on this point, Trimble emphasised that he is completely unaware of what the Framework Document will say on constitutional issues.

I said that as and when the Document is published, he should look carefully at how the two Governments deal with the existence of two jurisdictions in Ireland. I expressed surprise that so little was said about this at yesterday's meeting.

Trimble, in a change of mood, speculated that for the time being it suits the British Government to address itself mainly to a Sinn Fein audience. He stressed that nothing has been said to the UUP to this effect; it is just a possible inference.

The Future Talks Process

At this point in the discussion, Trimble stated that the UUP "has not closed the door" as regards future negotiations. [Comment: this is the message Ken Maginnis was giving on television this morning while Trimble was speaking on Radio Four in less compromising terms.] He mentioned that when the Framework Document comes out, the UUP will be ready to meet bilaterally with Michael Ancram to set out its position. [Comment: the implied message was that this is without prejudice to the UUP's attitude to round-table talks based on the approach in the Framework Document.]

The agenda for future negotiations

Using the word "agenda" which occurs in today's newspaper accounts of the Unionist letter to the Prime Minister, I put it to Trimble that stability in Northern Ireland, and in particular the achievement of stability within the framework of the United Kingdom, would be a major gain for Unionists. It was difficult to understand how negotiations holding out this prospect could be described as following "a Nationalist agenda".

Trimble said that "if stability is on offer, it is something we will have to look at". He described the process of negotiation as likely, on the other hand, to produce not stability but a "moving carpet" taking Unionists where they do not want to go.

I said that a new agreement ratified by referendum North and South could hardly be described as a "moving carpet". I asked Trimble what he had in mind when he argued that the Framework Document will follow only a Nationalist agenda.

He mentioned three issues of concern to Unionists:

- * the nature of the Irish Constitution [comment: although Trimble's public position has sometimes implied that the Constitution is an irrelevant issue]
- * aspects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement
- * the working of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

I asked him what he meant about the Assembly. Referring to the British Government, Trimble said, "they've made a mess of that one too". From indications given yesterday, the UUP fears that the Assembly will have so many checks and balances as to be paralysed.

On the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Trimble objected to "interference" by the Irish Government in such matters as judicial appointments. Matters of great concern to Northern Ireland were "decided at cocktail parties". There should be an Irish Consulate in Belfast rather than a "Joint Secretariat".

Pointing out that not everyone would agree with his characterisation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, I asked Trimble whether a strong Northern Ireland Assembly might not be the antidote to some of the things he dislikes.

Trimble did not directly disagree with this and accepted that a new range of interests for the two Governments, on East\West matters in particular, might be part of a more acceptable arrangement.

Defining the agenda

Trimble said that it would be helpful for the Framework Document itself to make clear that the agenda of future talks can include Unionist concerns. Also important are the statements and "body language" of the two Governments.

North\South body

I asked Trimble whether he could be specific as to his concerns about a North\South body.

He asked me in turn did I see a distinction between all-Ireland and cross-border bodies.

I said that "all-Ireland" seems to be associated in some people's minds with a "third Government" in Ireland, overriding North and South. I suggested that this is a misunderstanding and that without this misunderstanding, the distinction might not seem so important.

Trimble saw some merit in this argument. He feels, however, that any all-Ireland body should be consultative - and should derive its authority from Belfast and Dublin. "Executive power" should be used rarely and should happen not through the body itself but through specific agencies.

We discussed how our respective concepts could be applied in the area of tourism.

This brought Trimble to his concern that the relevant Dublin departments and agencies would use new arrangements to extract "advantages for the twenty-six counties and not for the six counties". In this connection, he cited tourism, inward investment, and the environmental responsibilities of the Foyle Fisheries Commission.

Trimble made the point that for him personally, his openness to North\South bodies has caused difficulties at grass-roots level.

Unionist public opinion

On the reaction to the Times story, Trimble asserted that he and his fellow Unionist MPs have public opinion behind them.

He feels that about twelve DUP Councillors and six UUP Councillors will defect to the UDP and the PUP. Nearly all of the defectors, in Trimble's view, can be suspected of having prior paramilitary connections. Although he has no personal knowledge or evidence, he is prepared to believe that between one and two - his own earlier estimate - and half a dozen -

the estimate put to him by others - Councillors of the UUP are essentially paramilitaries.

In Belfast in particular, there is a latent Labour vote. This applies in particular on the Nationalist side, going back to Jack Beatty before the Second World War, but it also applies on the Unionist side. But in Trimble's view the UDP and PUP are paramilitary fronts and will not ultimately be able to capitalise on left-leaning opinion among Protestants. (He mentioned in passing that an analogous movement started by Ken Gibson in 1974 came to nothing.) Neither does Trimble attach long-term significance to the re-emergence of the "Ulster Unionist Labour Association" within the UUP.

[Comment: overall, Trimble does not seem to feel that the position of the UUP in Northern Ireland politics is under serious threat.]

British politics

Trimble considers that John Major will survive as leader of the Conservative Party until the next election. It is "odds against" a Conservative victory. But Labour, the strong favourites, could lose if the Labour Party becomes disillusioned with Blair or if the active debate on policy within the Labour Party encouraged by the leadership leads to major errors of judgement. John Smith would have been a safer leader than Blair. The voting situation in the next Parliament could be tight if the Liberal Democrat vote holds up in Southern England.

Labour and Ireland

Trimble sees a clear change of policy on Ireland under Blair and Mowlam. Those who took a stronger line in the past have either changed their minds, which seems to be the case with Prescott, or are remaining silent, which Trimble believes is the case with Kevin McNamara and a number of backbenchers.

Trimble welcomes Tony Blair's family connection to Donegal, which he said makes Blair "sensitive and cautious on Northern Ireland". Trimble has gathered [comment: from Blair himself?] that the young Blair used to spend holidays in Donegal "while it was safe to do so". As though to explain this last point, Trimble added that Blair's father was a Glaswegian.

The PTA

Trimble is to see Michael Howard this evening, Wednesday, and will try to persuade him to be "statesman-like and diplomatic". This would mean accepting the need for

substantial changes in the PTA and EPA over time, and doing so in a manner which would enable the Labour Party to vote with the Government.

Trimble said in a light-hearted vein that he will use the word "diplomatic" because Howard would like to become Foreign Secretary - and has a very real chance because of his strong, but hidden, anti-European credentials.

Trimble mentioned that new emergency legislation could "distinguish between regions". One other specific point he made was that the right to search at ports of entry is bound to survive in new legislation because of the international dimension to crime.

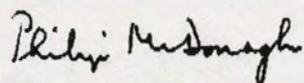
Europe

We briefly discussed the European issue. Trimble came across as a moderate who focusses on the need for the EU to adapt to a changing environment. He has major doubts about EMU in the absence of further convergence between European economies. He acknowledged that this could be a point for discussion in an Anglo-Irish context.

Trimble and Personal Ambition

I avoided all reference to the internal politics of the UUP. At the coffee stage, Trimble said that I might be interested to know how he has responded to a journalist's question about his ambition to replace Molyneaux. "So far from wanting to replace Molyneaux," Trimble told the journalist, "my goal is to have the Conservative Whip restored so that I can overthrow John Major!".

Yours sincerely



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor