



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/97/29

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

11/01/95 18:15

002/005

Ch. Murray
Ch. H. H.

Trimble
To me

25
AL

AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN

TELEPHONE: (202) 462-3939

FAX: (202) 232-5993

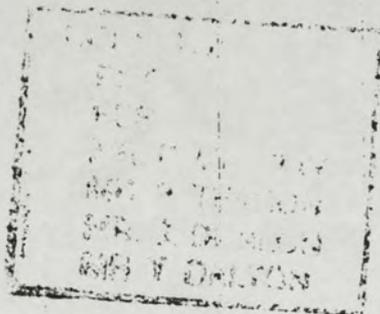
SECURE FAX

1 November 1995

Dear Secretary



EMBASSY OF IRELAND
2234 MASSACHUSETTS AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008



*Counsellors At
Box.*

Courtesy call by Unionist Leadership

1. David Trimble, accompanied by Ken Maginnis and Jeffrey Donaldson, called to the Residence last night for drinks, as arranged, and spent just over an hour there. I had earlier met the party at an American Ireland Fund reception in Trimble's honour; the attendance at this included Pat Doherty and Máiréad Keane of Sinn Féin, though no contact took place between them and the Unionist Leader. (I understand, however, that Jeffrey Donaldson may have refused to accept a handshake from Keane at the function).

Atmosphere

2. David Trimble was rather formal and somewhat distant when he arrived. This contrasted with an almost overly familiar approach by Ken Maginnis, who clearly intended to convey the impression to Trimble that he knew both myself and the Residence well; this, if anything, seemed to add to Trimble's initial aloofness. Jeffrey Donaldson, on the other hand, was extremely deferential to Trimble throughout. However, after about fifteen minutes (of hard work!), the atmosphere warmed considerably and Trimble was quite relaxed and sociable for the rest of the stay.

Discussion

3. After initially congratulating the Unionist Leader on his election, and welcoming him

11/01/95 18:18

2

to Washington, I conveyed my own sense of offence - and that of the great majority of the Irish community - at the Irish American Unity Conference's portrayal of Trimble in their advertisement in Monday's New York Times. While the Unity Conference was a fringe organisation which carried little or no clout, I said I would still be conveying my unhappiness about the whole affair to its President. I also mentioned that Niall O'Dowd would openly criticise the advertisement in an editorial in the Irish Voice this week. Trimble, in expressing appreciation, said he had decided to effectively ignore the advertisement - though, if he thought his audiences would have understood the joke, he said he would have welcomed being the latest addition to the Irish peerage!

4. The discussion then turned to the series of engagements here of the Unionist Leader, in particular the meeting with the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ben Gilman, and his colleagues. Trimble was quite dismissive of the Committee Members he met, apart from - to his surprise - Joe Kennedy whom he felt was the only one present without preconceived and unchangeable views on the North. Perhaps not surprisingly in the circumstances, a number of Members of the Committee, to whom I spoke yesterday evening, found it equally difficult to engage Trimble in any kind of open dialogue. They said they found him hardline and unyielding, and with a tendency to dismiss in a perfunctory manner any points they made. (By coincidence, I have a longstanding session with Joe Kennedy this afternoon, and his assessment of the meeting, in the light of the above, should be quite interesting).
5. The conversation then ranged lightly over a number of issues, including the marketing of the island as one entity for tourism purposes, the attractiveness of the Republic's 10% rate of corporation tax, and the recent moderate stances of the Reverend Ian Paisley. In this latter regard, Trimble said he was surprised at the extremely mild

reaction of the DUP to his Dublin visit. Overall, he was very pleased that Paisley seemed now to be responding to an Official Unionist driven agenda, rather than the other way round, as witness his visit to Washington and meetings with the Administration last week. He added, with considerable emphasis and a side swipe at his intelligence, that the credit being given in some quarters to Peter Robinson for this development was very wide of the mark indeed.

6. The question of the delegation's fairly consistent criticism of John Hume since their arrival also came up; this had included disappointment at Hume's alleged failure to respond to Trimble's requests for a meeting over the past six weeks, and also a "concern" about the SDLP's future electoral prospects given that Sinn Féin now had, the Unionists claimed, an inbuilt advantage through their fund-raising here. This led to one prominent journalist saying to Trimble that John Hume was well able to look after himself and, if his party faced a particular electoral problem, Hume was the proper person to address this publicly.

Comment

7. This was the first visit of a Unionist Party Leader to the Residence - although his colleagues have been here many times - and, as such, is to be warmly welcomed. In the circumstances, and given the initial aloofness of Trimble, I decided to create as relaxed an atmosphere as possible and, in pursuit of this, to keep the discussion fairly informal and general. I believe that this was particularly important if further visits were to be facilitated, and a worthwhile relationship developed. In the event, the exchanges were pleasant, and Trimble browsed in the Library, with photographs also being taken by the delegation, before he left.
8. My overall impression of David Trimble is of a fairly formal, cautious and yet quite

4

astute politician who is coming to terms with the demands of leadership, including the need to develop relationships in the South. He still seems somewhat uneasy and uncertain about this, undoubtedly reflecting a lack of familiarity with Southern society and politics over the years, but also perhaps a certain preconceived view of us. Overall, however, it was difficult to form a firm view from this limited get together of how open he will be prepared to be with us on issues - and this may continue to be the case, at least until he has more confidence in those about him or has further changed the team, or when we succeed in getting to know him on a personal (and one to one) basis.

Yours sincerely



Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

Seán Ó hUiginn Uas
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs