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Counsellors A-1

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18/9/97
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GP
Tapisearch

10 September 1997

essential for the 2 Govts
credibility
that any bluff by Trimble on Monday
or attempts to make things drift
is met
by the two governments.
No of pages including this one: 3
firmly

To: HQ
For: Second Secretary

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Meeting between Prime Minister and David Trimble

11.9.97

1. To confirm our earlier conversation, with the addition of some further details which have been obtained in the interim, we have been given a preliminary account of the meeting which took place between the Prime Minister and David Trimble in London today.
2. Minister Murphy will, of course, be briefing the Minister in full tomorrow morning. In addition, I understand that No. 10 may have reported directly to the Department of the Taoiseach.
3. The meeting lasted a couple of hours. We understand that Empey and Donaldson attended along with Trimble. The atmosphere has been described to us as good-natured, constructive and positive.
4. Much of the discussion focussed on Trimble's list of ten confidence-building initiatives (previous reports refer). The Prime Minister was anxious to help him as much as possible in this area and instructed Minister Murphy afterwards to expedite a number of items on which public announcements had been in the pipeline for the near future.
5. One of these relates to funding for schools. Tony Worthington, the Minister of State with responsibility for education, has already accepted privately the thrust of a report recently received from Coopers and Lybrand on this subject, one of whose recommendations is that the range of criteria for determining educational

disadvantage should be extended. Under Prime Ministerial pressure, a public announcement that the Government has accepted the recommendations and is to consult schools on them has been rushed through this evening.

6. A second concern relates to local government. An announcement is being prepared for tomorrow or Friday which will indicate that, reflecting a move already underway in Britain, local Councils here are to be consulted over the next few months on whether, or how, they might manage and develop property (previous reports refer).
7. A third concern, brought up by Donaldson, relates to action which might be taken to indicate solidarity with the victims of paramilitary violence. We understand that a commission may be established shortly to consider how best to commemorate the victims of such violence.
8. A further announcement expected shortly relates to firearms legislation. The UUP's particular concern is that the measures envisaged for Britain in respect of personal protection weapons should not be extended to Northern Ireland in their present form. We understand that a public commitment to this effect has already been given by the British Government but has not received much publicity. The intention is to draw fresh attention to this commitment.
9. The forthcoming policing legislation for Northern Ireland is another area in which efforts will be made (as yet unspecified) to meet Trimble's concerns.
10. We understand also that an article on the broad theme of confidence-building measures will appear under Adam Ingram's name in this Friday's News Letter. The original intention behind this article was to supplement the contribution by Minister Murphy in last Monday's Belfast Telegraph. It appears that it may now be used in a more proactive sense to furnish specific responses to some of the individual points raised by Trimble.
11. One such issue is that of "openness and transparency" in relation to the workings of the Agreement. Trimble reportedly demanded at today's meeting that the Maryfield Secretariat be "dumped". I am told that the approach in Friday's article will probably be to recognise the value of greater openness, to note the undertaking to provide Parliament with regular details of briefings given in the Secretariat and to flag

the likelihood of discussion of this matter at a future Conference meeting. I have emphasised in strong terms the intergovernmental nature of the Conference and the Secretariat and have warned against any unilateral initiatives by the British Government, whether in Friday's article or otherwise, before this subject has been discussed with our Ministers (let alone any steps agreed). These points have been registered fully on the British side.

12. As regards the envisaged joint statement covering consent, sufficient consensus and decommissioning, the Prime Minister gave an outline account of its contents, we are told, but did not show Trimble any language. We understand that the UUP leader's response was broadly positive. (We do not, of course, know the precise terms used by the Prime Minister in summarising the contents).
13. The impression formed on the British side was that Trimble is willing to proceed into substantive talks in exchange for (a) action, or at least the appearance of action, on his confidence-building agenda; and (b) assurances on the lines of those contained in the draft joint statement. They sensed that he is relatively relaxed about Saturday's meeting of the Executive Committee. He is hoping to receive a general mandate to go into talks, the tactical details to be left to himself and his negotiating team. The British impression was that he is not unwilling to participate in direct exchanges with Sinn Féin.
14. However, the British also had a sense that, whatever the outcome of Saturday's meeting, the UUP do not intend to turn up for next Monday's Plenary (though they will have a presence in the building).
15. As regards the procedural motion, this was not shown to Trimble and our understanding is that it may not even have been discussed with him as a concept. The British speculation is that he will ultimately support it but may try to "take his time over it", deliberately absenting himself and his party on Monday in order to frustrate the timetable set by the two Governments for the move into substantive talks. He may calculate that a non-appearance may cause the Plenary to be postponed to e.g. the following day and subvert any other scenarios which the Governments may be contemplating.
16. Finally, we understand that the Prime Minister planned to talk to Senator Mitchell this

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evening on the question of the chairmanships. In addition, Minister Murphy intended to talk further to Trimble.