



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

2 November 1998

See note,

TRIMBLE

The Prime Minister was not in the event able to speak to Trimble over the weekend, for a variety of reasons. However, Trimble was in no doubt of the message that the Prime Minister was trying to pass. I spoke to David Lavery over the weekend to ensure that he knew this, and to ask that he pass on to Trimble the Prime Minister's strong concern that there should be substantive progress at the meeting today on the Northern Ireland Departments and North/South issues.

Contacts with Paddy Teahon over the weekend made clear that the Taoiseach recognises that closure of these issues will not be possible today. But if there is no significant progress, the Irish too will be tempted to conclude that Trimble is not really serious.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Sebastian Wood (Cabinet Office), Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

JOHN HOLMES

Nick Perry Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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FROM: D J R HILL
Constitutional & Political Division
2 November 1998

cc see distribution below

PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)

As requested, I attach briefing for this afternoon's "plenary" meeting with the parties and the Irish Government.

(Signed)

D J R HILL
Constitutional & Political Division
11 Millbank ☎ 6591 (Castle Buildings ☎ Ext.22168)

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Jeffrey
Mr Stephens
Mr McCusker
Mr Bell
Mr Kelly
Mr Brooker
Mr Maccabe

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ROUND TABLE MEETING WITH PARTIES AND IRISH GOVERNMENT, 2 NOVEMBER

HMG's posture

1. This is not a formal meeting of the shadow NSMC, but it provides a real opportunity to take forward the consideration of North/South issues.
2. The primary need is for discussion and agreement between Northern Ireland representatives and the Irish Government. HMG has a consultative role. Therefore appropriate for FM/DFM to chair; for the Irish to play a major role in the discussion; and for HMG to take a back seat.

North/South

3. The meeting provides an opportunity for the NI parties to brief the Irish Government on the outcome of last Thursday's discussions. That identified 13 areas for possible North/South co-operation and the NI Departments have been asked to produce further technical assessments. The initial summary response from NI Departments, on which Mr Murphy could draw if necessary is at flag A.
4. Meanwhile the Irish have suggested (privately so far, to us, the FM/DFM; and probably Sinn Fein) 7 implementation bodies. The NI Departments' initial summary response is at flag B. Essentially
 - the Irish are aiming high - higher than previous exchanges at departmental level had suggested - presumably with a view to keeping Sinn Fein on board
 - we (and the NI Departments) feel that some of the proposals go beyond what is practicable or politically realistic
 - there seems virtually no prospect of the UUP agreeing to most of the Irish proposals. On the other hand, Sinn Fein (and the SDLP

to a lesser extent) may seek to hold the Irish Government to these relatively forward positions.

5. Although the Irish proposals are not formally on the table there is a real risk of considerable disagreement breaking out over the scope of the various proposed North/South bodies. Mr Murphy may need to intervene to calm things down, perhaps by encouraging the meeting to focus on agreeing a process for taking forward the consideration of these issues. [Eg further round table meetings among the parties, informed by further technical assessments; further plenary meetings with Irish Government (and HMG in attendance); suggested timetable for such meetings leading to conclusions within [4] weeks].

6. In practical terms it would be helpful if the discussion could focus on generic areas, leaving Departments North and South to provide detailed advice on what responsibilities might be assigned to implementation bodies within those areas. If it seemed helpful, Mr Murphy might suggest that and undertake to promote urgent work by the Northern Ireland Departments, in consultation with relevant Irish Departments.

Wider Issues

7. The plenary could provide opportunities for
- Sinn Fein to challenge the UUP over the failure to form a shadow Executive, and the two Governments over their failure to move things along
 - UUP to challenge Sinn Fein over IRA failure to signal any move on decommissioning

8. This could all heighten the temperature. If necessary Mr Murphy might

- point to the need for early substantive decisions on Ministerial portfolios and North/South implementation bodies if devolution is to occur early in the New Year (see flag C)
- acknowledge disappointment that the shadow Executive Committee and shadow NSMC have not yet been established
- but draw encouragement from last Thursday's meetings and this plenary as demonstrating that real engagement on the substantive issues can nevertheless be taken forward
- urge other participants to continue that progress and agree machinery and a timescale for doing so
- emphasise that real progress in implementing all aspects of the Agreement (Ministerial portfolios, North/South bodies and decommissioning) will reinforce the credibility of the Agreement, and appeal to all concerned to use all their influence to that end.

9. For completeness I attach (flag D) a paper illustrating how an implementation body (on tourism promotion) might work.

10. All of the attached documents have been sent to the FM/DFM but are not likely to have been circulated to the other parties; and we have not (yet) shared them with the Irish.

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