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Reference Code: 2021/97/30

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5 DECEMBER 1995

TO HQ
FOR SEC O HUIGINN

FROM WASHINGTON
FROM P HENNESSY

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TRIMBLE ON THE HILL

1. The UUP leader met yesterday with a group of Congressional staffers. The group was small - about 7 or 8 offices were represented - and did not include any members. Trimble had earlier paid brief courtesy calls on the Speaker and Majority Leader Trent Lott. He did not meet with Senator McCain, as previously envisaged.

2. Trimble was apparently in fairly robust form at the meeting with staffers, coming across as confident (some thought, even smug), with touches of arrogance showing through. Those present were particularly struck by his strong criticism of the IFI (see below).

3. Among the main points to arise:
 - Trimble said that he did not understand the basis for the intense speculation about a new ceasefire. He characterized the period up to February '96 as merely a tactical cessation, and recounted the catalogue of IRA activity in the intervening months. He claimed not to know the contents of the Hume/Adams proposal, adding that even if Sinn Féin did come into the talks they would not be in a position to make a constructive contribution.

- Asked the price of SF admission, he referred to the need for a genuine and permanent ceasefire (again quoted President Clinton's statement of 8 November approvingly). This would entail (i) an unambiguous statement, (ii) commitment to the Mitchell Principles, (iii) a time-table for decommissioning (with an early first installment) during the talks, with the understanding that failure to adhere to the time-table would lead to the suspension of the talks, and (iv) a period of time (unspecified) to assess the genuineness of IRA commitments.

- He reiterated his interest in engaging with the SDLP and in moving ahead with substantive talks, without waiting for Sinn Féin. However, when pressed to identify the issues where he was prepared to move forward, he could only instance economic development. It was pointed out to him that this was going ahead in any event, and scarcely addressed the issues at the heart of the peace process.

- On decommissioning, he referred to the publication of the British legislation, and complained at the lack of similar progress on the part of the Irish Government.

- Trimble dealt aggressively with questions on Drumcree: the fault lay with the local nationalist community; international press criticism reflected a lack of understanding of the traditions and ethos of the unionist community; nationalists at heart welcomed the controversy because it gained them international sympathy. His audience was particularly taken aback by his remark that while last summer had been bad, the situation could be even worse next year.

3

— In what one source described as a particularly cavalier tone, Trimble delivered himself of trenchant criticism of the IFI. He said the Fund had been “shameless in its discrimination”, and that this was well-known. While the Fund leadership, including the Chairman, Mr McCarter, now recognized that there was a problem discriminatory practices continued. He contrasted refusal to aid a Scotch-Irish heritage foundation (?), promoted by individuals in the Unionist community, with a positive decision in respect of an allegedly similar body on the nationalist side. [Comment: Among those to whom I spoke following the meeting was Helms’ staffer (about whose reaction Gilman’s staff were concerned). She had not found Trimble convincing on this issue, and thought this the general reaction. Nevertheless, we will of course continue to avail of appropriate opportunities to highlight the determined efforts of the Fund to establish links with both communities.]

4. The overall impression left by the UUP leader was one of some satisfaction at the present conjecture of events, allied with a more confident personal style than seen here previously. However, on substance, informed interlocutors have registered clearly his hardline position on the key political issues, and the abrasively unapologetic stance on issues such as parades. He will also be disappointed that, despite his consistent down-playing of Sinn Féin’s role, the White House again saw fit to reiterate its support for an early move to an inclusive talks process.

ENDS