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(3) *Tadiseank*
There are useful
insights here. Reid copy
is one of the most
reasoned observers around here.

(25)

Secure Fax: 587

29 May 1996

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30/5/96

To: HQ
 For: Second Secretary O hUiginn

From: Belfast
 From: Joint Secretary

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Subj: Conversation with Ken Reid

1. Ken Reid, the UTV political correspondent, made a number of points of interest about David Trimble in a conversation which I had with today.
2. The UUP leader, whom he sees frequently, is in a very rattled frame of mind at present.

First, Trimble is worried about the diffusion of the Unionist vote in this election and the impact which this will have on the UUP's performance. Though the laments which he has been expressing in public on this subject are somewhat exaggerated (to encourage a higher UUP turn-out), Trimble is "a worrier" and the phenomenon of a wide diversity of choice for Unionist voters is unsettling him greatly in his first election as leader.

Second, the election campaign is allowing his chief rivals, Paisley and McCartney, to parade to advantage their superior campaigning skills, their better tactical instincts (as in their successful efforts to have their own names added to the ballot paper) and, in Paisley's case at least, their longer electoral experience.

Third, a good showing for the DUP and the UKUP tomorrow coupled with an indifferent performance by the UUP (e.g. a result around 30 seats) would raise basic questions about the leadership of the Unionist community. Trimble has been unchallenged Unionist spokesman since last autumn but his honeymoon is now coming to an end. McCartney has undisguised ambitions to supplant him in that role and his alliance with Robinson is a powerful one. There is likely to be more and more talk of a common Unionist strategy for the forthcoming talks, dictated effectively by McCartney and Robinson, and a weakened Trimble will be unable to mount much resistance.

Fourth, Trimble is getting no assistance at present from his fellow MPs, who are relishing their leader's problems in an election largely of his own making and of little relevance to them (given that almost all of them have been excluded from the envisaged UUP talks delegation). Willie Ross, Clifford Forsythe and Cecil Walker have not attended a UUP Parliamentary Party meeting since Trimble's election and have barely spoken to him. A poor election performance would play directly into the hands of his critics, internal and external, and Trimble is well aware of this.

Fifth, Trimble has very few close advisers with any electoral experience and this is not helping him either at present.

Last but not least, Trimble performs badly under pressure and the combination of the above factors with his naturally volatile and explosive temperament is inauspicious.

3. I commented that John Hume's blunt riposte to Trimble's complaints about an election which only he wanted would strike a chord with many people.
4. On the question of the chairmanship for the talks, Trimble has indicated privately to Reid that he would have no difficulty with Senator Mitchell (and he proved this by showing him a copy of the letter which he wrote recently to President Clinton). He claimed, however, that some of his party colleagues (he mentioned John Taylor and Reg Empey) are opposed to the involvement of an American and the implication of international mediation or arbitration.
5. Trimble mentioned to Reid that, at his most recent meeting with the Prime Minister, the latter seemed quite distracted (understandably in view of the BSE and European crises) and was evidently not "up to speed" on current developments in relation to the talks. Papers which, Trimble presumed, the Prime Minister would have seen prior to their meeting were brought to him during the meeting and were clearly being read for the first time.
6. McCartney's call on the Prime Minister last week (which, you may have noted, Conor Cruise O'Brien described more flatteringly as a "summons to Downing Street") arose from a suggestion made by Reid to McCartney that, if Trimble could request meetings in No. 10 once a week, so could he.

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7. Finally, Reid mentioned that, when he suggested on TV last week that the election would prove to be "a shambles" (because of the complexity of the electoral arrangements, the proliferation of small parties, the likelihood of a low turnout and, most of all, because parties were taking up extreme positions from which they would find it difficult to extricate themselves later), the Secretary of State rang him at home to regret that Reid had presented matters in such unhelpful terms. I suggested that there would be many who would support Reid's assessment.

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