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SECURE FAX**3 DECEMBER 1996****FOR JAMES MCINTYRE FROM KATE SLATTERY****DAVID TRIMBLE ADDRESSES WASHINGTON FORUM**

1. Mr David Trimble, the Ulster Unionist Party Leader, this morning addressed a breakfast meeting hosted by the Sheridan Circle, a small group of middle-ranking Irish-American professionals and public servants in the Washington area, who occasionally host meetings on Irish issues. The Sheridan Circle is not, by any standard, a significant forum. The breakfast, which took place in a restaurant in downtown Washington, was attended by approximately 40 guests, including journalists (both RTE and Ulster Television, for instance, were present).

Summary

2. Mr Trimble, who spoke for approximately 20 minutes (without a prepared script), emphasised that the focus of his party was at present directed to:
 - continuing the talks process during the "window of opportunity" which existed in the period up to January when, he argued, the British election process would take priority; and
 - seeing a "genuine" ceasefire put in place.

Talks Process

3. On the current talks process, Trimble said that the issues that were holding up movement to substantial discussions were "very small". He hoped, therefore, that the talks could move on to a new phase before January. He also saw progress in the talks as being the only way to bring pressure on Sinn Féin to join the political process. In this regard, he mischievously referred to the Tánaiste's position as being "that the talks should be held over until it was possible to include Sinn Féin", and said that such a position was not acceptable; it would mean in essence that Sinn Féin would have "an absolute veto on the political process".

Ceasefire

4. On the prospects for a ceasefire, Trimble said that, while the UUP would give every encouragement to its restoration, the main problem was the fear that it would not be "genuine". Many now believed that the 1994 ceasefire was a "tactical move" by Sinn Féin; an announcement of a renewed ceasefire at this time would be seen in similar terms and as primarily designed to gain political credibility in advance of the British elections. As evidence of the above, Trimble asserted that it was now known that the IRA had been actively engaged on preparations for the Canary Wharf bomb "before President Clinton's visit to Belfast, and while he was in Belfast this time last year". Trimble added that the British Prime Minister's statement of last week, and President Clinton's call for a "genuine cessation of violence", echoed Unionists' concerns that any ceasefire must be more than just a tactical move.
5. While he saw some reasons to be relatively optimistic about a renewed ceasefire (the Loyalist ceasefire had held; there was, apparently, no evidence of broad support in hard core Republican areas in West Belfast for a return to violence; and recent IRA

efforts seemed directed at the Army), Trimble nevertheless said he believed that "once again the IRA had no genuine wish to renounce violence". As evidence of this, he referred to recent changes in the IRA Army Council, with two hardline IRA members having been promoted (one who was "in charge of the arms dumps in Limerick and Cork that had come from Libya", and the other "who had directed the IRA bombing campaign in London in the 1970s"). This was hardly evidence of a move towards a renunciation of violence.

SDLP

6. Trimble argued strongly that the UUP and the SDLP would have to be "the centre of gravity" in forthcoming negotiations, including if Sinn Féin were to join the process. However, he said he was very concerned that "John Hume, in his attempts to get a ceasefire restored, may be heading into a trap" being set for him by Sinn Féin. In this regard, he saw Sinn Féin's real aim as being to cause a split in the SDLP in advance of the British general election, thereby weakening their electoral support.
7. In response to questions, Trimble said that the purpose of his visit to Washington was to renew acquaintance with the Administration following the US elections and not, "as some claim", to lobby for or against Senator George Mitchell, who had been "a good Chairman" of the talks. He saw the role of the Administration as being to "encourage those who would bring peace to Northern Ireland, and discourage those who are against it".

Outcome of General Election in Britain

8. When asked whether the outcome of the election would have a major impact on the North, Trimble said that there was "very little difference between the Labour Party

and the Conservatives on the substantive issues"; one difficulty, however, might be the lack of experience in government of the Labour Party, should it win. He added that, "on the other hand, Sir Patrick Mayhew has been in office for quite some time, and is still not familiar with the issues"!

Drumcree

9. In response to a question about Unionist provocation of the Nationalist minority at Drumcree, Trimble said that Drumcree was "an attempt by hardline Republicans to strike at the heart of the Unionist tradition and ethos". He denied that the march was a deliberate attempt to provoke the Nationalist community, saying that the route was the same one that had been followed for decades (with the exception of some adjustments suggested by the RUC). The ensuing civil disorder was "certainly not of our making". His party had given evidence to the North Tribunal on parades, and they looked forward to the publication of its report in January.

10. Trimble was also asked to comment on press reports that Martha Pope had been romantically involved with Mr Gerry Kelly. In response, he said that both Senator Mitchell and Ms Pope had issued statements denying any knowledge of such a relationship, that Ms Pope had said she had never even met Mr Kelly, and that he had "noted" these statements. He added that perhaps Sir Patrick Mayhew should have the matter fully investigated, as the story had apparently originated with the British security services.

Ends