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cc Secs

17 June 1997

To: **Pat Hennessy, Embassy Washington**
James McIntyre, Anglo-Irish Division, HQ

From: **Barrie Robinson, Consulate General, New York**

Visit of David Trimble to New York

1. Mr. Trimble was the guest speaker today at a lunch hosted by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, which is chaired by Bill Flynn. Mark Little, RTE, and Kevin McHugh, Irish Times were among a number of journalists in attendance. New York City Comptroller Alan Hevesi, who will visit Ireland at the end of the month was represented by Ed Fitzpatrick and Pat Doherty from his Office.

2. I understand that Mr. Trimble had welcomed the opportunity to meet again with the NCAFP, where he had made an unfavourable impression on his previous visit in November 1995. His tone on this occasion was measured and the change in his demeanour was the subject of some positive comment although those I spoke to afterwards were less convinced by the substance of his presentation. The subsequent question and answer session was fairly muted. Mr. Trimble seemed at pains to establish a good rapport with his audience and began by stressing the importance he attaches to developing his contacts in the United States. Apart from the role played by the US Administration, he noted the very active interest of many American individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland while observing that this concern had manifested itself at times in ways which Unionists considered unhelpful. He appreciated the platform the NCAFP offered to explain his party's perspective on the situation in the North.

3. He welcomed the widespread condemnation in the US of the shootings in Lurgan and was especially appreciative of President Clinton's statement. He shared the hope that Loyalists would not retaliate but expressed concern that splinter elements might do so.

4. Mr. Trimble argued that the most recent developments underlined a need to end what he described as wishful thinking in regard to Sinn Fein intentions. He acknowledged that it was not ignoble to take risks for peace in certain circumstances providing the security and stability of society were not jeopardised in the process. He said that the UUP had been prepared, following the

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Downing Street Declaration, to give time and space to the efforts to secure a permanent cessation of violence. However, in his view, the 1994 ceasefire did not fully meet the requirements of the Declaration. Developments since the breakdown of the ceasefire had confirmed him in the view that the Republican movement was not prepared to commit itself exclusively to political methods or to accept the principle of consent. He thought their strategy was to use the carrot of a cease-fire and the stick of occasional violence to extract concessions. He also accused SinnFein/IRA of deliberately seeking to destabilise society by exacerbating tensions over issues such as parades, quoting from RTE's disclosure earlier this year of remarks allegedly made by Gerry Adams on the subject at an internal SF meeting in Athboy.

5. He was encouraged by the speech given by P.M. Blair in Belfast last month particularly his statement that the "settlement train" would leave without Sinn Fein in the absence of an IRA cease-fire. The two Governments should now proceed on this basis.

6. He repeated his recent suggestion that the decommissioning issue should be pigeon-holed. It was not possible to agree on the issue at the present time, nor, in his view, was it necessary to do so in the absence of Sinn Fein from the talks. He argued that this approach would remove the main obstacle to substantive negotiations and was confident that this would pave the way for agreement on the talks agenda. He defended the continued participation of the Loyalist parties in the talks inspite of recent Loyalist violence and in the absence of any move to decommission on their side. Without excusing violence by Loyalists, he said that there was no evidence of involvement by Loyalist paramilitary organisations related to the parties in the talks. The UUP had made it clear to the Loyalist parties and paramilitaries that they would have to comply with the Mitchell Report requirement that both sides must decommission in parallel.

7. The talks had been deadlocked over procedure and he believed that this had obscured the potential for agreement among the parties, except Sinn Fein, on substantive issues. He maintained that it should be possible to devise a viable political alternative capable of commanding sufficient cross-community support to isolate the extremes and deny them the means to continue a campaign of violence. He hoped that the SDLP would cooperate with his party in the search for progress.

8. Mr. Trimble envisaged a settlement encompassing four main elements:

a) A Northern Ireland body elected on a PR system to which limited powers would be devolved. It would discharge its business through a number of Committees. Committee chairmanships and membership would be allocated between the parties in proportion to their representation in the body.

b) As the major functions of government would continue to be exercised from London, improved structures were needed at Westminister to enable Northern Ireland MPs to have greater input into and review of policy decisions affecting the North.

c) a Bill of Rights together with application of relevant OSCE principles and procedures in relation to protection of minority and group rights.

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d) replacement of the Anglo-Irish agreement by a new British-Irish agreement which would resituate the accord in the wider context of the two islands and focus on fostering appropriate cross-frontier relations and cooperation (although he did not refer to it explicitly, it seems that the aim is to weaken Ireland's role under the Anglo-Irish Agreement in relation to internal issues in the North). He argued that this would reassure Unionists while preserving an institutional link with the South for Nationalists.

9. Asked by Mark Little whether he could envisage any situation in which he would meet with Sinn Fein representatives, Mr. Trimble said that, while he would "never say never" he did not detect any real desire on the part of Sinn Fein to fulfil the conditions necessary for such an encounter.

Parades

10. In response to a question from Kevin McHugh, Mr. Trimble said that it was highly desirable that consensus should be reached on the parades issue. If this were not possible, ways would have to be found of managing the situation peacefully without either side feeling that its position was irretrievably prejudiced. He felt that the Orange Order's initiatives to explain its position, in particular its recent letter to all Garvaghy Road residents, had been constructive and that, on balance, had helped to improve the atmosphere.

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