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Reference Code: 2021/99/16

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Secure Fax: 618

23 June 1997

No of pages including this one: 3

To: HQ
For: Second Secretary O hUiginn

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Meeting between David Trimble and Paul Murphy

*Tainiagh
This is somewhat
overstated by initials
but para 6 is off
continuing interest*

To confirm our earlier conversation:

1. David Trimble met Paul Murphy, in the absence of the Secretary of State (who was away from Belfast on parades-related business), at Stormont Castle this morning. He was accompanied by Ken Maginnis, Peter Weir, Peter King and David Kerr.
2. According to the account I received from David Hill, there was "hard pounding throughout". Trimble was already in hostile mood because of the reported content of the aide-memoire to Sinn Féin, in particular the envisaged six-week period. He also denounced the principle of a joint paper on decommissioning, regretting that the British Government had talked to ourselves rather than to the Unionists on this subject. (The British responded by recalling their protracted exchanges with the UUP on decommissioning).
3. I am told that the British showed the draft paper to Trimble and his colleagues, having excised the two variants in para 7, and that all copies were retrieved when the meeting ended.
4. Trimble's basic reaction was, on the one hand, to signal a readiness to enter substantive talks on the basis of parallel decommissioning (rather than prior tranches or scheduling) but, on the other, to claim that the two Governments' paper did not clearly reflect this approach. He held that there were too many ambiguities in the wording and that there was no clear acceptance that we would be going forward on the basis of actual decommissioning taking place during the negotiations. The British challenged this, pointing to the various references to due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive talks etc.

*W. H. Hill
26. 6. 97*

5. On specific textual points, Trimble complained about the proposed handling of confidence-building measures. The British had hoped that this complaint, which the UUP leader had already made in response to the Secretary of State's outline of the paper at an earlier meeting, might have been diminished when Trimble saw the full text. They pointed to the terms of the remit for the sub-committee, whose third tier was intended to meet his concerns, but Trimble remained dissatisfied.
6. As regards the review Plenaries, Trimble underlined his need for a review at the point when a Plenary was held to enable Sinn Féin to sign up to the Mitchell Principles. He did not, however, mention explicitly on this occasion a requirement for onward movement from such a review to be determined by sufficient consensus.
7. Among other points, Maginnis criticised the fact that the Independent Commission was not already in existence.
8. Murphy emphasised that the paper represented the two Governments' best judgement of how a way forward might be found on decommissioning. He said that the Governments would be happy to explain and defend it (but he did not, I am told, signal any openness to proposed amendments). He made no commitment as to when the paper might be tabled but mentioned a general expectation that this might happen tomorrow and said that "we're on course for that".
9. Trimble commented that it would be unhelpful if the paper were to be tabled tomorrow. He preferred that it should be held over until after the Prime Minister's statement on Wednesday afternoon.
10. In internal discussion afterwards on the British side, the idea was floated that tabling might be postponed until Wednesday morning. The British fear, in the light of Trimble's reaction today, that the UUP leader will reject the paper out of hand if it is tabled tomorrow afternoon, i.e., at some slight remove from the Prime Minister's statement on Wednesday afternoon. They see some merit in bringing the two events closer together, so that Trimble might opt to delay his response to our paper until after he has heard the Blair statement. The British expect, and have no doubt signalled to Trimble, that this statement will combine publication of the recent aide-memoire with robust denunciations of Sinn Féin and warnings that "the train is about to depart etc."

Their thinking is that, looked at in the round, it may provide Trimble with sufficient cover to enable him to deliver a relatively constructive response to the joint paper.

11. I observed that it was equally conceivable that the UUP leader would find grounds to attack both documents and that, while the difference between Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning might not be substantial, the benefits of delaying tabling were not immediately apparent. Given the public expectations that it would be tabled on Tuesday, the balance of advantage might lie with going ahead tomorrow. I agreed, however, to relay the idea for consideration on our side.
12. As for tomorrow's Plenary, the British expect a prolonged tirade from McCartney arising from reports of the Sinn Féin aide-memoire as well as criticism of Trimble for the latter's decision to go to London for a meeting with the Prime Minister rather than attend the Plenary.
13. Finally, I understand that the question of Mo Mowlam's attendance at the Blair/Trimble meeting, the timing for which is not yet clear, remains to be settled. If she goes to London, her place at the talks will be taken by Paul Murphy. We have made the point that, in circumstances where the two Governments are about to launch a major initiative, but with the British Government taking the lead in selling it to the Unionists, the presence of the Secretary of State here would be of great importance. I understand that consideration is also being given to having Murphy attend the London meeting instead of the Secretary of State.