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Reference Code:	2022/45/645
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25 November 1999

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Dermot,

Conversation with David Trimble

I had a word with David Trimble last night at the Queen's Annual Reception in Buckingham Palace. He appeared to me to be reasonably relaxed and quietly confident, but not complacent, about Saturday's vote. He said, holding up his crossed fingers, that the trend was in his favour but that he was not there yet. The UUC he said was a very particular body and would not take to strong arm tactics or obvious pressure; that was why he preferred a relatively "quiet approach" in the lead up to Saturday. He voiced two main fears:

- one, that in the coming days Sinn Féin either unwittingly, or in order to be provocative, would say something that would cause doubtful members of the Council to harden their attitude to the outcome of the Mitchell Review. In this respect it was interesting that he was not particularly critical of Pat Doherty's remarks in Boston, appearing to accept that the brief account of a lengthy interview could be misrepresented. He had greater worries about Martin Ferris and wondered if Ferris was as committed to the package as the others. His view of Ferris seems to be influenced to some extent by Sean O'Callaghan;

- second, that the dissidents would manage an incident which would derail

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the process. On this point he was particularly pleased with the passage in the Taoiseach's speech promising further pre-emptive action and the undertaking to use the law to the full in the case of dissident groups or individuals who store arms. This he said had gone down well with the Unionist community. Trimble's wife, Daphne, who otherwise did not comment on current developments, was similarly enthusiastic on this point.

Beyond the imminent vote, Trimble said that the next test would come in January. If he can get through Saturday he expects that the "general euphoria" and the Christmas spirit will carry everyone into the New Year. However, he is not at all sanguine about the prospects of something satisfactory on decommissioning in January and feels that the month will be a testing time all round.

John Sawers, whom I also had a word with, had the same cautious analysis. He said that Taylor was coming around but was not there yet. Like Trimble he too sees implementation as particularly tricky.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Barrington
Ambassador

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