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Developments within the Ulster Unionist Party

Discussion with Jack Allen

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I met with Jack Allen, Treasurer of the Ulster Unionist Party, in Belfast to discuss developments within the Ulster Unionist Party in the run up to the meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council in the Waterfront Hall on Saturday (28 October). He made the following observations

- While there have been discussions between the pro and anti Agreement elements in the party, no consensus has been reached to date. Allen and the Party Chairman (and acting President) Lord Rogan represented Trimble and the pro-Agreement group at the talks while Donaldson, Jim Rodgers, Arlene Foster and Hutchinson (?) negotiated for the No Camp.

- The No side refused to reveal their "bottom line" during the discussions while pressing the other side to put forward proposals. Trimble was very fearful that any proposal put forward as an opening bargaining position by his side could be used against him later at the UUC. While Donaldson was being reasonable, the others were clearly determined not to reach agreement. Allen claimed that this refusal to negotiate seriously has helped stiffen Trimble's resolve for Saturday.

- The No camp seem to formulating a proposal which would see UUP Ministers withdraw immediately from the North/South Ministerial

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Council and Unionist nominees on the Cross-Border bodies begin to boycott their positions. In addition, the UUP Ministers would withdraw from the Executive by 30 November if there had not been a substantial beginning made to actual decommissioning. The end of November was chosen because Trimble stated at the UUP Conference in September that he regarded John Taylor's three month ultimatum as "too long". Taylor's deadline would have run out at the end of November.

- Trimble has still not decided on his own tactics. He will put down a motion with "the least damaging conditions" he thinks he will be able to get away with. However, this will involve at a minimum the running down of the North/South Institutions and a threat of withdrawal from the Executive in the future if there is no more progress on decommissioning.

- Allen said that there have also been "hush-hush" talks between Trimble and the British about a possible package of measures to assist the UUP leader. This may involve some measures on Trimble's own pre-occupation with racketeering. Allen was not sure of the areas that would be covered.

- Trimble has taken comfort from private meetings with some of his critics within the party, including Pauline Armitage and Roy Beggs jnr. Both have told Trimble that although they have serious policy differences with hi,m they would support him in a leadership contest with Donaldson. Allen emphasised that Donaldson does not enjoy any great personal support within the party and repeated his assertion that Trimble would defeat him in any head to head contest for the leadership.

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- Allen said that there has been surprisingly little canvassing activity to date of the UUC delegates but the Pro-Agreement people intend to step up their efforts over the next few days. Reg Empey will take a prominent role and is to speak at a dinner in Derry on Friday night.

- However, given the fact that the Trimble has still to outline his position, Allen claimed it would be impossible to make a prediction about Saturday's meeting.

Note: The meeting took place before the IRA issued its statement so we had no discussion of its possible impact.

Ray Bassett
Anglo-Irish Division
26 October 2000

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