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TAOISEACH

14 July 2000

Mr. Dáithí O'Ceallaigh
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Secretary,

Conversation with David Trimble on Police Bill

I had an opportunity to discuss the Police Bill with David Trimble today. He said he was concerned at the negative noises out of Dublin on the name and he hoped that we would be able to tone down our rhetoric on that issue in the coming period. For his own part he felt that the provisions on the name as it now stood met both Unionist and basic nationalist concerns. He thought he could sell it to his Party and to the wider Unionist community; but he could not contemplate any changes to the text as it now stood.

In relation to the Irish Government's position he said that Peter Mandelson had told him that we had been "egging on" Sinn Féin and encouraging them to take a tougher stance. I replied that this was nonsense. Sinn Féin has their own position, as did the SDLP. The Irish Government's concern was to implement Patten in such a way as to make the new police service acceptable to nationalists. I presumed that that was his goal also. Trimble noted what I said and wondered whether he was being subjected to some of "Peter's spin". I did not respond to that, but emphasised that there was no question of the Irish Government urging either Sinn Féin or the SDLP to take a tougher position. He might have noticed that the public posture of the Government on the Bill while it went through the Commons had been relatively low key - to the extent that it

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might even draw criticism from Sinn Féin and the SDLP. What we wanted was a resolution of the issue that the two parties could live with and that they could recommend to nationalists. The "anger" on the Government's side that he referred to arose out of our concern that this opportunity might be missed, and at the handling of the amendment on Tuesday night. He acknowledged the validity of the latter point, without of course adverting to his own role in the matter.

I asked him why the definition amendment was so objectionable - was it the principle of the amendment or was it the content i.e., particular elements in the definition? He said that the problem for him was that the amendment, if it were accepted, would make it clear that the name "incorporating the RUC" would never be used in any circumstances. It took away from the Chief Constable and the Policing Board any possibility that they might designate some use in the future for the longer title. He had to be able to reassure his constituency that there might be some circumstances where the longer title might be used. I said that the constituency on the nationalist side would take the exact opposite view.

Trimble questioned this. He said that he was not convinced that the name as it now stood would present insuperable problems for Sinn Féin. In fact he felt that Adams was quite relaxed on the name issue, more relaxed than the Irish Government might be prepared to admit.

Overall, Trimble was in good form. He was good humoured, and while he wanted to get his points across he did not display the impatient or argumentative side of his character which he can sometimes do when he is challenged.

Yours sincerely,

Ted Barrington

Edward Barrington
Ambassador

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