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Mr. Gillin  
S.H.

to Hume  
in view  
3/1/96



**Confidential**

22 December 1995

Mr Sean O hUiginn  
Second Secretary  
Anglo Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Sir  
Do see please  
3/1/96

COPY TO:  
FST  
PSS  
MR. F MURRAY  
MR. P TEAHON  
MR. S. DONLON  
MR. T DALTON

3/1/96

Sean  
JB

Dear Second Secretary

**Conversation with the Secretary of State**

I was invited last night to a reception which the Secretary of State gave at Hillsborough Castle in honour of Seamus Heaney.

Sir Patrick took me aside at one point for a private discussion in which he suggested that (a) good progress is being made in the political track; and (b) the impasse which the twin-track scheme is intended to overcome could be resolved through agreement on an electoral test (the indexation approach) which would enable David Trimble, and hence the British Government, to settle for less on decommissioning.

The Secretary of State is encouraged by the range and depth of the contacts which have taken place among the parties, and also between the Governments and the parties, over the past week or so. **Important momentum has been built up**

**Both Trimble and Hume have been reporting in positive terms on their recent meeting.** While the agenda was focussed deliberately on economic issues, there is clearly potential for this dialogue to widen out into a political discussion of the nature of the institutions required to give effect to a shared economic philosophy.

On his own meeting with Hume, he said that this went well. The SDLP leader seemed to feel,

however, that things are moving "almost too fast" in the political track - and that the forthcoming Christmas break will offer a salutary respite.

Wednesday's trilateral with Alliance was, in the Secretary of State's view, a great success. Alderdice gave a good account of himself. Sir Patrick sensed that the Tanaiste was more impressed by him than on previous occasions. What Sir Patrick values about Alderdice is his rationality - "he's the only sane psychiatrist I know". I demurred slightly from this assessment, recalling one or two instances in the past when the Alliance leader betrayed suspect judgement.

The Secretary of State is also impressed by the DUP's constructive stance at present. In contrast to the UUP, for example, they have done a lot of thinking about the form which an elected body might take (as demonstrated in their recent document).

The "key to everything", however, is Trimble. The UUP leader wishes to be Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and "we have to count back from there". He is worried about Paisley and feels an abiding need to protect his flank from the latter. Hence his intemperate and offensive remarks in his letter to the Tanaiste. But, even if he appears to take one step back - at regular intervals, he is also intent on taking two steps forward over a longer period of time.

The Secretary of State thought that Trimble was "very bad news" when he was first elected. He has gradually revised his opinion of the UUP leader, however, and now regards him as somebody whom "we can eventually do business with".

There are, however, still many eccentricities. When Sir Patrick met him this week, Trimble opened the meeting with a complaint about a new pound coin in Northern Ireland which bore what appeared to be a Celtic design. Sir Patrick was astonished at the triviality of this complaint (and made this clear to Trimble).

I emphasized the responsibility which the British Government has, given its considerably closer relationship with Trimble, to persuade the latter to move forward. No political progress will be possible in relation to Northern Ireland other than on the intergovernmental basis which the two Governments have steadfastly - and successfully - developed over the past fifteen years. There is an onus on Sir Patrick and his Ministers to impress this on Trimble and to ensure that, as a necessary concomitant, the UUP enter a full and open dialogue with the Irish Government.

The Secretary of State accepted this presentation but again suggested that the UUP leader would "need some time".

The two Governments will, however, have to get into a more intensive phase with the parties during January. Sir Patrick fears that, if, for example, the International Body reports in mid-January and "no agreement is reached" on the report, and if at the same time there are no signs of a developing consensus in the political track, a serious vacuum will arise by early February. He would like to head this off by pursuing actively during January "the makings of an agreement" in the political track which might "tide us over" any difficulties arising from the Body's report.

(C)

I observed that a positive response by the British Government to a report which proposed an alternative to Washington Three would, of course, prevent any such difficulties from arising in the first place. Sir Patrick again emphasised that "the key to this is Trimble". From a recent conversation with the UUP leader, he believes that, if Trimble appears to be getting something of what he wants in the political track, he will agree to scale down his demands on decommissioning. He would, in other words, allow the new political fact of an election to be the means of getting around the decommissioning blockage.

I gave Sir Patrick an opportunity to mention also the British Government's own agenda in this area (its supposed commitment to Washington Three irrespective of the Unionist position) but he conspicuously declined to do so. If Trimble moves, he made clear, the British Government will do likewise.

So what will persuade Trimble to move? While admitting that his own ideas on elected bodies are still "very unformed", and that he needs to brush up on the various options over the Christmas period (which he will be spending at Hillsborough), the Secretary of State feels that agreement may be possible in the political track on "some form of electoral test". He categorically ruled out any prospect of persuading the SDLP and Sinn Fein to accept an Assembly or Convention. However, elections for the purpose of renewing mandates and determining the negotiators at three-stranded talks might just about be acceptable "all round". He was emphatic that the sole purpose of elections would be to "get us into three-stranded talks - that's all I want them for".

I pointed to the many drawbacks of an election at this time, the differing views on mandates etc and I suggested to the Secretary of State that SDLP or Sinn Fein support for an electoral test of any description could not be taken for granted. He recognised this but still felt that an "indexation" approach represented the best prospect for convergence in the political track. Noting that, according to Alliance and the DUP, the Body has been showing a lot of interest in the question of elected bodies, he suggested that Senator Mitchell and his colleagues are also beginning to see that it is through that route that the decommissioning problem will be resolved.

Yours sincerely

*David Donoghue*

David Donoghue  
Joint Secretary

*cc. Patsy Ronan*