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3 DECEMBER 1996

TO HQ
FOR SECRETARY O HUIGINN

FROM WASHINGTON
FROM P HENNESSY

DAVID TRIMBLE

1. I attended a dinner last evening for the visiting UUP delegation hosted by the Northern Ireland Bureau of the British Embassy. The guest list for the function, which was attended by about 35 people, included Kitty Higgins (White House Cabinet Secretary), Virginia Manuel (Commerce), some from the local Irish-American community and others with direct Northern Ireland business or family links.
2. Trimble said that he was "generally comfortable" with the position as enunciated by Prime Minister Major last week. He made clear that he did not believe Sinn Fein/IRA were seriously interested in a cease-fire, and dismissed suggestions that Major was motivated by a desire to secure Unionist support for his administration ("after all, John Hume has 4 votes he can deliver...").
3. While professing scepticism on Sinn Fein intentions, Trimble suggested that there were grounds for optimism on two counts:
 - local attitudes in areas such as West Belfast and South Tyrone were

resistant to re-starting a full-scale campaign. He credited President Clinton's visit with helping to mold public opinion in these areas.

-- the restraint shown by Loyalist paramilitaries (for which he claimed some credit for the UUP).

4. Regarding the prospects for talks, he said that he made clear to the SDLP earlier in the year that there was a window from October-December when progress could be made. The opportunity had not been seized, and with the imminent Christmas recess effectively signalling the start of the British general election campaign, prospects for progress were rapidly disappearing. He interspersed his comments on the Talks with a number of remarks critical of the Tanaiste's role. He quoted the "not worth a candle" comment to suggest that the Tanaiste had no interest in seeing the talks advance in the absence of Sinn Fein.
5. Chances of securing a lasting cease-fire had been further aggravated by changes in the composition of the IRA Army Council. In this context, referring to Gerry Kelly he spoke of week-end press reports (which had not otherwise been mentioned), while rather obviously making a point of not mentioning Martha Pope by name.
6. Trimble throughout sought to convey a positive assessment of the Administration's role in the process. He referred in approving terms to the President's comments at his press conference on 8 November, suggesting that the reference to a "genuine cessation of violence" was precisely the point on which the UUP had sought to make a stand. Clearly angling for a more openly critical attitude towards Sinn

Fein, he urged the Administration to actively discourage those who were unhelpful to the peace process, as well as lending support to those who were.

7. He suggested that Sinn Fein was in any event now focussed on the next Irish general election, and that it was banking on a change of government to re-establish the relationship which he claimed prevailed in the Reynolds era.

8. Trimble was asked a number of questions about parades, including by Patrick Macrory (son of the author of the Macrory Report on local government) who politely, but insistently, took issue with Trimble's implication that the trouble was entirely due to lawlessness on the part of Republicans. The UUP leader blamed unspecified legislative changes in the 1980s for accentuating the problem, and rehearsed well-worn claim of a Sinn Fein presence "at the heart" of the various community groups involved.

9. Showing what I think came across as a disagreeable aggressiveness, in what was otherwise a generally polished performance, Trimble said that he could not guarantee that there would not be a repeat next July of this year's events. He noted that the North report was due in early January, but with the clock running out there would be little time to enact legislation, and, he suggested, this was probably as Mayhew intended it.

Comment

10. There has been some comment since Trimble's arrival here that he is engaged on something of a charm offensive. Kitty Higgins of the White House, who was seated beside Trimble at dinner and with whom I took a lift from the function,

contrasted his affability in private conversation with previous encounters.

However she was also struck by what she regarded as the very pointed reference to the Gerry Kelly case.

11. Overall, Trimble will have won marks for his readiness to explain his position, and aspects of his presentation were quite skilfully done, including his embrace of Administration positions. However, **Drumcree remains a dead-weight and his responses on that issue were less well-received, as was also the case with his criticisms of the Tanaiste's role in the peace process.** (In conversation afterwards with Jeffrey Donaldson, I suggested that these latter remarks were not only inaccurate, but self-defeating. I understand from Kate Slattery, who has reported separately on the Sheridan Circle breakfast, that Trimble's comments this morning, which unlike last night were open to the media, may have been more muted in this regard).

ENDS