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20 December 1996

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

COPY TO:	YE
PST	22
PSS	12
MR. P. TEAMON	
MR. S. DONLON	
MR. T. DALTON	

Dear Secretary,

Conversation with David Trimble

At short notice I was invited yesterday to the Christmas reception at the Unionist Information Office in London. The invitation came by fax in the names of David Trimble, David Burnside, and Patricia Campbell.

The reception was held in two largish offices in a plush commercial building off the Strand, evidently the headquarters of David Burnside's public relations company. I would reckon that there were 80 guests at the peak of the reception and perhaps up to twice that number overall. The atmosphere was more that of an expanded office party than of a major reception. Some of those I encountered were Unionists living in London, probably the financial supporters of the Office. The only British MP I met was Andrew Hunter. There was no evidence of British Labour Party involvement.

I spoke to both Unionist MPs present, John Taylor and David Trimble. Trimble was happy enough to discuss substance, and switched from "Mr. McDonagh" to "Philip" over a period of fifteen minutes. I set down below the main points he made. The Sunday Telegraph journalist Matthew D'Ancona was a party to most of the discussion.

Meeting with John Major

Trimble had met the Prime Minister during the day. The main message he sought to convey to Mr. Major was that it is essential to save the talks at Stormont from the danger of a collapse in the new year. Thinking should start now as to how to achieve this. This is not to say that the talks will "go anywhere" before a general election.

IRA intentions

Trimble expects an IRA ceasefire in or around the month of February. It will be a "tactical" ceasefire and will not satisfy the requirements for entry into negotiations. The purpose will be to

- * maximise Sinn Fein's vote
- * "trap Mr. Hume into an electoral alliance"
- * put pressure on Blair as the incoming Prime Minister.

The policies of a Labour government

Trimble said that the Scottish Labour MPs, who have a feel for the situation in Northern Ireland, have helped to bring about a better balance in Labour party policy on Northern Ireland. However, about 100 Labour MPs after the general election will be new to the House of Commons and their attitude is unpredictable. Mo Mowlam is more sympathetic to the Unionists than Kevin McNamara "but that doesn't say much". In reply to a question from D'Ancona, Trimble did not seem to take too seriously the possibility the Jack Cunningham would replace Mowlam as Secretary of State. D'Ancona then suggested the name of Brian Wilson as a possible Secretary of State [comment: Wilson is a Scottish MP who has been a frontbench spokesman on various subjects since 1988]. Trimble thought Wilson an unlikely figure to become involved in Northern Ireland given "the huge number of Orangemen in his constituency".

On the specific question of admitting Sinn Fein into negotiations, Trimble said that for Tony Blair this could become, along with EMU, one of the biggest

headaches in the early days of a Labour government. Blair's instincts would be similar to the Prime Minister's. That might not go for "others" [comment: Trimble was unspecific here, but he seemed to be referring to the Labour party collectively]. Moreover the Irish government and the Americans would be eager to bring Sinn Fein in.

I pointed out that the Taoiseach in his public comments in Washington has called on the Republican movement to recognise that it is in their own interests to have a ceasefire now with a view to entering the talks process before the general election. Trimble did not argue with this.

George Mitchell and Martha Pope

Trimble said that while in Washington he lobbied as best he could for George Mitchell to be named as Secretary of State. While Mitchell could not be described as sympathetic to Unionists, he understands the issues and "knowledge is as good as sympathy". Trimble suggested that the "US intelligence services" may have been responsible for the recent headlines about Martha Pope [comment: whether the nationality of the intelligence service in question was adapted for the ears of Matthew D'Ancona was unclear].

Northern Ireland and minorities in Eastern Europe

Trimble in a not unfriendly way suggested to me that his own views on the significance of Transylvania for Northern Ireland have been misunderstood. He said that there are 1.7 million Hungarians in Romania according to conservative Romanian statistics and that within the Hungarian community Roman Catholics, who make up 50%, and other Christian denominations work closely together. Trimble has met church representatives from all sides. He personally believes that the Hungarian minority should be given more than is provided for under the recent agreement. In particular there should be local autonomy in areas in which the Hungarians are in the majority. It is true that Trimble mentioned in a speech to the IPU that the singing of national anthems other than that of Romania carries a prison sentence. But Trimble himself deprecates this. The Hungarian national anthem is included in the standard evangelical hymn book in use among the Hungarians in Romania which makes the provisions of Romanian law ridiculous.

I said that if this was to be a serious conversation, I felt bound to ask whether

Nationalists in Northern Ireland would feel that the legislative framework in Transylvania would have anything to offer them.

Trimble responded that the new agreement to which Budapest has agreed is twenty pages long and that in a document that size there is bound to be something useful. [Comment: the exchange was light-hearted enough. I would imagine that Trimble's commitment to the talks process, as communicated earlier in the day to the Prime Minister according to his own account, is a more significant indication of his political position.]

Tony Blair and the Garvaghy Road

Trimble said that following his meeting with Blair on Friday last at a farm in Portadown, he travelled back to town (Lurgan?) in Blair's car. At a certain moment it became clear that there was a useful shortcut available down the Garvaghy Road. Trimble was tempted. But just in time, he said, he restrained himself, and avoided creating a story which would have been held against him for a long time to come: "Trimble takes Blair down the Garvaghy Road"!

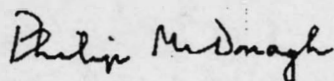
Conclusion

I have little doubt from the tenor of our conversation that Trimble feels that a Labour government will be less favourable to the Unionists than the Conservatives have been, and not only because Labour will likely have a clear overall majority.

I took at face value Trimble's commitment to the present talks process, although he also said at one point, and rather unhappily, that he has no idea where we will be a year from now.

His relative openness was engaging, as was the anecdote told against himself about the Garvaghy Road.

Yours sincerely,



Philip McDonagh
Counsellor

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GB

Mr. Philip McDonagh.

David Trimble MP, David Burnside and Patricia Campbell

have pleasure in inviting you to a Christmas Reception

**At the Unionist Information Office GB
14 Buckingham Street
London WC2 6DN**

On Thursday, 19th December 1996 at 6pm until 8pm

yes

**RSVP: Patricia Campbell
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UNIONIST INFORMATION OFFICE G B

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