SECRET AND PERSONAL

Copy 2 of 9

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

23 November 1993

cc PS/SoFS(B) - 1
PS/PUS(L) - 2
PS/Mr Fell - 3
Mr Thomas - 4
Mr Deverell - 5
Mr Rickard - 6
Mr Cooke - 7
Mr Beeton - 8
Mr May - 9

Dear Jonathan,

MINISTERIAL MEETING ON NORTHERN IRELAND: 23 NOVEMBER

The Prime Minister held a meeting on Northern Ireland on 23 November. Your Secretary of State, the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Cabinet Secretary, H.M. Ambassador at Dublin, John Chilcot, Quentin Thomas and John Deverell were present.

Copies of this letter should not be circulated beyond the Private Offices of recipient Departments.

Your Secretary of State described discussion of the Taoiseach's draft joint declaration between Albert Reynolds, Archbishop Eames, and James Molyneaux. After the leak of an Irish government document on 19 November, Molyneaux had decided that he could not take any further part for the time being. On 20 November, he had issued a press statement warning that the British Government was acting on flawed advice. Sir Patrick Mayhew and the Prime Minister had spoken to Molyneaux by telephone over the weekend. He was evidently under pressure within his own party, and also needed to avoid being outflanked by the DUP.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- debate within PIRA appeared to be continuing. No conclusion had been reached. McGuinness seemed somewhat isolated. There was considerable opposition to a cessation of violence. Attacks on the Security Forces continued. However, at brigade level a ceasefire of three months was under discussion;

- Adams had been encouraged by the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis and by wide support for the Hume/Adams dialogue. We did not have evidence that the Taoiseach's joint declaration would be accepted by PIRA;

- while a document might be a vehicle for a PIRA cessation, its substance would not be the determining factor. If PIRA decided on a ceasefire, it would be because of the pressures on the organisation and calculations about its future prospects;

- for a joint declaration to work, it had to have the support of the Taoiseach and the British Government, and the acquiescence of James Molyneaux;

- the Taoiseach was keen to go ahead and to test PIRA. There was a popular perception in the Irish Republic that an opportunity existed. If it was not taken, there was a risk of increased support for Republicanism in the South, and the creation of the myth that the British Government had turned its back on a chance of peace. The Taoiseach would feel personally let down if we made no response to his proposal. He might try to go it alone with a text of his own which he judged to be acceptable to PIRA and also to Unionists;

- mistakes made by the Taoiseach and by the Irish government, including the leaking of the document and failure to restrain Hume, had made it difficult to proceed with the joint declaration.

After further discussion of the documents attached to your letter of 22 November, and of the pros and cons of postponing the Dublin Summit, it was agreed that:

- the Prime Minister would have a further, entirely private, discussion with James Molyneaux M.P., to sound out his likely attitude to the form of joint statement which we were considering proposing to the Irish government as an alternative to their joint declaration;

- in the light of that meeting and of any further developments, we could not proceed with his joint declaration, largely because of the atmosphere created by the Irish leak, the apparent continuation of the Hume/Adams dialogue, and the impossibility in present circumstances of securing sufficiently broad acceptance of the document;

- the balance of advantage appeared to lie against postponing the Dublin Summit. Postponement would raise expectations of the results of the Summit;

- our position would need to be explained very carefully to the Taoiseach. He was likely to find difficulties with our text, and to be disappointed that we were no longer willing to proceed with his joint declaration. It would be best for our response to be presented directly to him, rather than through his officials. One way of doing this would be for the Cabinet Secretary to meet the Taoiseach, with H.M. Ambassador, perhaps armed with a letter from the Prime Minister.

It was agreed that your Department would circulate an annotated version of the British draft joint statement, to provide Ministers with a further opportunity to reflect on points which had been raised at the meeting, and to be sure that it protected our position fully and in a way which should not attract denunciation by mainstream Unionists. The Northern Ireland Office would also provide a draft letter and speaking note for use by officials in presenting the Government's decision to the Taoiseach.

The Prime Minister agreed with your Secretary of State that further contingency work should be set in hand to refine the Government's response to stories in circulation among journalists and others in Northern Ireland about exchanges with Sinn Fein.

I am sending copies of this letter to the John Sawers (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jeremy Heywood (H.M. Treasury), Joan MacNaughton (Home Office), John Pitt-Brooke (Ministry of Defence) and Melanie Leech (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Roderic

RODERIC LYNE

Jonathan Stephens, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.