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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

18 July 1996

Dear Martin,

IRISH TALKS WITH SINN FEIN

Paddy Teahon gave me the following account of the 90 minute meeting between Irish officials (mainly himself, Dalton and O'hUiggin) and Sinn Fein (Adams, Doherty and others) on 17 July. He described it as "not the worst" meeting they had had.

The meeting had three separate themes:

- (i) Discussion of Drumcree, and its implications for the Apprentice Boys march. On the latter, Sinn Fein's line was that a deal had been emerging before Drumcree, but was now more difficult (for both sides). There was a level of anger on the streets that would be hard to contain - Sinn Fein claimed that last week many of their activists, including McGuinness himself, had been told to get lost by the crowds when they had called for restraint. But Sinn Fein still thought there was a good chance of a deal, and would work for it, together with Hume.
- (ii) A plea for a meeting with the Irish at Ministerial level, using the argument that the Irish Government were still prepared to meet Trimble, despite his breach of the Mitchell principles.
- (iii) A call for a radical rethink of the peace process, i.e. reshaping it to include them. They had also suggested they could have a dialogue with Mitchell.

Teahon said that the Irish answer to both (ii) and (iii) had been that Sinn Fein had a heaven-sent opportunity to put themselves in the right by declaring a ceasefire now. The Sinn Fein response had been that they were indeed working for a ceasefire, but it would simply not be credible at the moment with their

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own activists. On the Mitchell point, the Irish had said Mitchell could talk not to Sinn Fein while he was Chairman of the talks - it was too obviously a conflict of interest. They had also pointed to Sinn Fein's continuing lack of credibility as a peaceful party while IRA activists were still obviously preparing violence, as the Irish and most recently London catches demonstrated. (I have recorded separately Sinn Fein's comments on the Hume/Adams initiative.)

The two sides have agreed to meet more regularly again. There will be a further meeting this weekend, focusing mainly on preventing trouble in Derry in August.

Comment

It is clearly now business as usual between Sinn Fein and Irish officials, but the Irish do not (yet) seem to have sold the pass on Ministerial contact. I also picked up no suggestion that Sinn Fein should now be allowed into the talks without a ceasefire. According to Teahon, the Taoiseach's own view of Sinn Fein remains pretty jaundiced, although he recognises the gains they have made from last week's events.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin by fax.

Yours are
John

JOHN HOLMES

Martin Howard, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.