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No. 9598 P. 2/11
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From: The Private Secretary

cc: EO
JA



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File
JH 29/7

22 July 1996

Dear John

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

You sought further advice, in your letter of 18 July, about Hume's approach following his further discussions with Adams after the Prime Minister's letter to Hume of 8 July.

Hume/Adams' proposal

2. The proposal, as described by Hume to you, is this:

- Sinn Féin want certain assurances. All of these, if Hume has got them right, are consistent with our public positions and could easily be repeated in a speech;
- if we warn Hume in advance that we are about to make such a speech, we would get a guarantee from Adams in advance that the IRA would respond immediately to such a speech by declaring a ceasefire, which would be for good this time;
- once Sinn Féin entered the negotiations on foot of such a ceasefire, Sinn Féin would make the necessary commitment to the Mitchell principles.

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3. As you pointed out to Hume, Adams' letter of 26 June was much vaguer.

4. Your conversation with Teahon elicited some confirmation of Hume's account:

- Teahon confirmed that Adams was seeking some assurances;
- but Teahon added that Adams was seeking a meeting with officials before any public statement; and
- Teahon was a good deal vaguer about the consequences to flow from any public statement. He said nothing about the guarantee of an IRA ceasefire.

5. We have now received, via Hume, a proposal that a guaranteed IRA ceasefire - said to be for good, this time - will be put in place if the Government gives certain assurances about the all party negotiations - assurances which, if correct, we know we could give without changing our position.

6. Whatever our view on its credibility, there is the potential for this approach to leak into the public domain with some risk of embarrassment to HMG unless we are seen to have treated it with some seriousness, albeit cautiousness as well.

Assessment

7. There are clearly a range of possibilities:

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- the proposal might be genuine;
- Adams could be fishing. He could think he might be able to get a ceasefire, but first of all wants to know what we could offer to help his case with the IRA;
- it might be a deliberate attempt by Adams to draw us into a series of exchanges and meetings with Sinn Féin, to provide them with further legitimacy despite the continuation of IRA violence, even though he knows an IRA ceasefire is undeliverable;
- Hume could be gilding or muddying the message. On the face of it, reassurance that 'decommissioning would only be tackled during negotiations' seems far from the IRA's unambiguous position that there will be no decommissioning short of a final settlement;

8. We cannot tell for sure what is behind it. If possible therefore, we want to avoid the risk of either being thought to have spurned what might be presented as a genuine approach, or appear to be suckered into believing a purely tactical manoeuvre.

Effect of Drumcree on Sinn Féin's standing

9. This needs to be considered against the background of the consequences of Drumcree. This was, in the words of the Irish Government, a "seismic shock". The landscape is radically different now. In particular:

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the unionist community as a whole was seen by nationalists to use violence, and the threat of violence, to get their own way. For virtually all Catholics, and a good number of moderate Protestants, the Orange Order has proved to be the violent wing of unionism as the IRA is the violent wing of nationalism;

by comparison, Sinn Féin's public stance - calling for calmness and restraint, even in the face of demands for a violent response - has rehabilitated Sinn Féin to some extent. It is not that the actions of the IRA have been forgotten, but that unionists and the Orange Order are thought to have descended to their level. Dr Alderdice, for example, has told us that he cannot think of a convincing reason now why Sinn Féin should be excluded from negotiations when Mr Trimble is allowed in;

where Sinn Féin were previously outside a "democratic consensus" of the Governments and the rest of the parties, Drumcree has reunited nationalists from Cardinal Daly to Gerry Adams in a common view that unionism is prepared to resort itself to force when it suits it, and HMG is unable (or unwilling) to stand up to it.

10. These radical shifts have already resulted in the Irish Government having a further official level meeting with Sinn Féin. Fianna Fáil have said they no longer support parallel decommissioning. So has Dr Alderdice.

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A response

11. Hume is awaiting a response of some sort to his approach. There is also mild pressure (likely to build up now for the reasons set out above) from the Irish and the Americans to explore it further.

12. We suggest that a safe, avowable but nonetheless serious response might consist of a written note, intended to be seen by Sinn Féin, which had the following elements:

- a clear account of what we have been told is the proposal. (This means that, if either Adams or Hume have deliberately misled us, they will be exposed to the other);
- an indication that we can give the assurances we understand Sinn Féin have sought, so making it clear that nothing should stand in the way of an IRA ceasefire;
- the repetition of the possibility of a meeting with officials, if the approach is confirmed by Sinn Féin and the circumstances are right, including events on the ground.

13. I attach a draft of such a response. It has been written with the possibility of subsequent publication in mind, in case that became necessary. In that case, the response would be defended as entirely consistent with our public position, and a serious attempt to establish whether Hume's approach - which, on the face of it, means there should be no obstacle to a ceasefire - was genuine.

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14. We could send this as a letter direct to Adams himself. This would be the most direct method, cutting out the risk of any gilding of the message. Or we could give the response to Hume, as a position paper but in the knowledge that he would hand it on to Sinn Féin. This is less direct and preserves Hume's role as an intermediary.

A meeting?

15. The draft response - as did the Prime Minister's letter of 8 July - keeps open the possibility of Sinn Féin meeting officials.

16. We do not need to reach a decision now. But if we received some confirmation of Hume's approach from Sinn Féin, a meeting (which would have to be avowable) would allow us to check that Sinn Féin understood what was expected of them and that we understood their position correctly. Against the background of the 'seismic shock' of Drumcree, it might help keep the Irish and US Governments on board, and put the Government back on the front foot.

17. Equally, there would be the risk of appearing to confer further legitimacy on Sinn Féin. The draft response - which could be published subsequently to justify a meeting - might reduce that, but clearly some risk would remain. We have, however, deliberately kept open the possibility of a meeting because we might need to explore or confirm just the sort of proposal we have now received.

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Conclusion

18. For now, we simply need to decide what response to give to Hume. We recommend a response as attached, either as a letter direct to Adams or given to Hume as a position paper which can be passed to Adams.

Yours ever
David Vile

pp **MARTIN HOWARD**

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