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From: John Holmes
Date: 12 February 1997

PRIME MINISTER**NORTHERN IRELAND**

As you know, Paddy Mayhew rang me this afternoon. He was courteous, as always, but clearly angry. He complained first of all about the Trimble letter and your proposed reply (papers attached). He was particularly concerned about the idea that we should take at all seriously the UUP ideas: these were very far-reaching, contrary to Government policy in their implications and impossible to get other parties interested in at all.

I said that you were clear that the UUP ideas would not run, but thought that no harm would be done by at least continuing to talk to the UUP about them, rather than giving the impression that they had been rejected out of hand. Paddy said there was no point in talking further to the UUP about them – they wanted us to sell them to the other parties and this was clearly impossible. There was a lot more in the same vein.

Michael Ancram also spoke to me about this subsequently. There was genuine alarm in the NIO about appearing to give credibility to off-the-wall UUP ideas. I explained in blunt terms your political concerns. He accepted this, but made the (reasonable) point that the NIO did in fact bend over backwards to keep the UUP sweet, in all kinds of ways. If the UUP wanted their ideas to be taken forward, it was surely for them to try them out on the other parties.

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I agreed to hold back the letter to Trimble you had signed and have another look at it. I now attach a revised version with which the NIO would be much happier, and which still makes the important points about the Grand Committee.

But you should also be aware that Trimble is now seeing Cranborne tomorrow morning apparently to complain that his complaints are not being taken seriously. Cranborne knows the score in detail and will try to calm him down.

Secondly, Paddy was distressed about your unwillingness to sign a letter to John Hume regretting Bloody Sunday (papers attached). He thought this was very important in Northern Ireland and he was sorry to see his carefully considered advice rejected (my letter does not actually reject the idea altogether). A perfectly clear distinction could be drawn between regretting and apologising, and he could not see how anyone could object to expressing regret for an incident which was already accepted by us to have been a tragedy. He was happy to see Hume and the families himself on Friday but needed to be able to say something to them. He proposed to say that he greatly regretted what had happened on that day.

I undertook to pass all this on to you. I assume you will still not want to sign a letter yourself, but I fear it will not be easy to stop Paddy using the word "regret" in talking to John Hume. This is livable with as long as he makes clear he regrets all the violent deaths in Northern Ireland, not least those on Bloody Sunday, and does not make a public thing of it afterwards (although Hume of course may).

On the Hume/Adams front, the NIO are also unhappy with our response (my letter out attached) but they have accepted it. Michael Ancram will just exchange lists of questions with Hume tomorrow. But I fear the issue will come back again and we are bound to have a further argument about the replies to their questions, in

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particular whether Sinn Fein "would" be invited to join the talks if there was a ceasefire etc. But let us fight that battle when we have to. I cleared the terms of my response with Cranborne, but I know he would have liked it to be even tougher. As we discussed, the death of a soldier tonight hardly helps Paddy's arguments.

Nonetheless it would be helpful to have a soothing word with Paddy in the margins of Cabinet if you can, if only to reassure him that his advice is taken extremely seriously but that you have to take into account the politics more than he does. His response will be that Trimble will bring you down when he feels like it, whatever you do, but the fact of talking to him should still help.

Content:

- to sign the attached revised letter to Trimble?
- ✓ - for Paddy to use the word "regret" in talking to Hume and the families, as long as it is in the right context
- ✓ - to soothe him in the margins of Cabinet?

**JOHN HOLMES****12 February 1997**

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