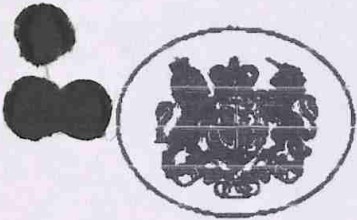


5. Feb. 1997 20:44

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No. 3411 P. 2/4

From : THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

cc FA/APS
V Press

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

WHITEHALL

LONDON SW1A 2AZ

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

① cc (by fax) Margaret Alred,
MOD

② Back to John 6/2.

5 February 1997

Dear John

BLOODY SUNDAY

Your note of 3 February asked for advice on John Hume's proposal that the Prime Minister see two family members from among the Bloody Sunday victims.

My Secretary of State entirely shares your view that such a meeting presents considerable difficulties but he also has some sympathy for Hume's point that there is value in demonstrating the role ordinary political channels can play rather than leaving the ground clear to extremists.

Sir Patrick believes that we should support Hume in his efforts to counter Sinn Fein's influence and that there is also virtue in showing, consistent with our whole approach to the political process in Northern Ireland, that the Government is sensitive to the feelings of victims' families (not only those of Bloody Sunday, of course, but not excluding them either).

Sir Patrick proposes that he offer Hume the meeting himself. He also suggests that the Prime Minister writes to Hume welcoming the approach and uses the chance to make an expression of regret for Bloody Sunday. A draft, which the Secretary of State might hand over, is attached for consideration. As you know, leaders in the Newsletter and The Express and supported by Ken Maginnis, have called for an apology from the Government. The draft relies on the distinction between regret and sorrow on the one hand and an apology, implicitly accepting responsibility, on the other.

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Our judgement is that those words would be seen as a considerable step by the Government and would be welcomed by the Irish among others. It pressed to go further we could stand comfortably upon them.

Sir Patrick notes that in his speech in Coleraine in December 1992, to which public reference is still frequently made, he included the following passage:-

"The history of the island of Ireland as a whole, you will need no reminding, is in many respects both saddening and up-lifting. You will not find me seeking to argue that Britain's role in this island has only ever been associated with what has been up-lifting. On the contrary, there is much in the long and often tragic history of Ireland for deep regret, and the British Government for its part shares in that regret to the full."

This, he thinks, is not much different in character from what he now proposes.

Yours ever
David
for W R LINDSAY