



From : THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

WHITEHALL

LONDON SW1A 2AZ

cc: PB
PresSee
letter at
File
John 17/2

Prime Minister

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear John.

This needs to be looked at with
the other papers in Hume / Adams
elsewhere in the box. But I think
a reply to Adams from me can go
ahead anyway. I have stiffened
up the NIO draft but it, February 1997
is still relatively conciliatory. Are
you content with this, and with
the opening left in the final
paragraph for an official level
meeting if circumstances
change? John 11/2.

LETTERS FROM GERRY ADAMS

Thank you for your letters of 3 and 10 February, enclosing letters
of 31 January and 10 February to the Prime Minister from
Gerry Adams.

Adams has briefed the press on both occasions that he has written to
the Prime Minister. He also wrote to the Taoiseach around
31 January. We do not yet know whether the Irish intend to reply,
although officials have put advice to the Taoiseach suggesting that
a response should issue.

The first letter is largely rhetoric, intended for public
consumption. The second letter may also be intended for that
purpose alone - but it comes after a weekend of fairly intense media
activity by Adams. He has used this successfully to appear to put
the ball in our court - there is a good case for a response, both to
set out our position clearly and to put the ball back to him.

The attached draft reply seeks to do this. It sets out the huge
contrast between Adams' words and the IRA's deeds, and reminds Adams
that it is for the IRA to deliver a ceasefire which will secure
Sinn Féin's entry to negotiations.

At the same time, it also repeats our desire to see Sinn Féin in those negotiations if the proper requirements are met. This is a point which Dick Spring asked the Secretary of State, when they met last Thursday evening, to get across, rather than exclusively attacking Sinn Féin with every utterance. The letter also holds out the possibility of considering whether there are any genuine questions about the Government's position which require some answer. This ensures that the door is not slammed to genuine questions as to what are the requirements the IRA must meet.

On the specific question of a meeting with Government officials, the policy remains that such a meeting is not ruled out but must be subject to events on the ground. It could only be explanatory and exploratory, and would need to have a clear and defined purpose. This has been reflected in the public line we have already taken on Adams' comments.

It is clear that the current spate of attacks by the IRA do not create the circumstances in which a meeting could be remotely productive. But, to avoid the trap Adams has no doubt set for us of appearing to be wooden and unable to make any positive movement this side of the election, we should be careful not to rule out the possibility of such a meeting if the circumstances were right.

A copy goes to Jan Polley.

Yours ever
David Kyle
for W K LINDSAY