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CONFIDENTIAL

British Embassy  
Dublin

Prime Minister

20 February 1997

J Holmes Esq  
PS/No.10

(By fax)

Dear John,

To glance at highlighted  
pages, particularly pages 9 and  
10. Paddy Treacher has raised this  
possibility with me a couple of times.  
I have been very cautious. X would  
of course be explosive - and I think  
the Taoiseach would also want to go  
back to trying for language about  
a commitment to Sinn Féin's inclusion  
in the talks when they resume.

I assume you would want  
me to go on being cautious in the  
extreme. Content?

CALL ON THE TAOISEACH - 20 FEBRUARY

1. I called on the Taoiseach this afternoon. I offered warm  
personal best wishes from the Prime Minister and thanked him  
for his recent strong statements about IRA violence.

Lance Bombadier Resterick

2. The Taoiseach first expressed his sympathy and outrage at  
the murder of Stephen Restorick. He said he much appreciated  
the invitation he had received to the funeral. Diary  
commitments prevented him from accepting. But Ambassador  
Barrington would represent him.

Bloody Sunday

3. The Taoiseach admitted that he had not heard the  
Secretary of State's "Inside Politics" interview last  
Saturday, but had received the impression that Sir Patrick  
had moved away from the Prime Minister's undertaking to  
examine any fresh evidence. If true, this was a pity. He  
personally felt strongly that the victims should be given the  
opportunity to express their need for reconciliation.

4. I said that I, in turn, was concerned to hear his views,  
because Sir Patrick's position was the reverse of the one the  
Taoiseach had just described. The Secretary of State had  
told the Tanaiste that he regarded Bloody Sunday as a  
"disaster" and Mr Hume that the events of that day were a  
cause of deep regret. He had also re-stated our commitment



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to examining any fresh evidence. The Secretary of State's expression of regret was a conscious decision and his comments were not intended to rule out the possibility of an apology if one were justified following the study of new evidence.

5. The Taoiseach responded that he was seeing the relatives of the victims at 6.30 p.m., and wondered if it would be helpful if he were to set the record straight with them.

Comment: After consulting Jonathan Stephens I told the Taoiseach's office that if the Taoiseach thought it appropriate, he could say:

- i) we had said we will examine any evidence extremely carefully;
- ii) we have already said we regret that events as a terrible tragedy which should never have occurred. The Prime Minister had said victims should be regarded as innocent and that the Secretary of State had said, after his meeting with relatives last week, that "we regretted the events of that dreadful day had ever occurred".
- iii) We have not prejudged the evidence presented. In his weekend interview the Secretary of State made plain we have not had a chance to scrutinise it. No options have been ruled out. If there is new evidence appropriate action will be taken.

#### Taoiseach's Visit to Fermanagh

6. The Taoiseach said he was sorry if there had been any misunderstanding about the procedures to be followed. He had no wish to by-pass these. But he had not been to Northern Ireland for some considerable time and felt the need to do so, so that he could claim to be well-informed. He hoped that the Unionists would not misinterpret his visit and commented that he had been invited to lunch by the Unionist Chairman of the City Council of Fermanagh.

7. I said that the Northern Ireland Office had told me that he would be extremely welcome, with the proviso that in future they would appreciate as much notice as possible of any visit, to enable them to make the necessary security arrangements.

#### The Talks

8. The Taoiseach said it was encouraging that the SDLP, UUP and Alliance had been trying to harmonise their positions, but disappointing that they had made so little progress. He had the impression from discussions with Unionists, e.g. Reg Empey, that they were adamantly opposed to sitting down with Sinn Féin, hence their obdurate attitude. The SDLP, on the other hand, were intent on ensuring an entry mechanism for

He's  
going to  
Finniskillen



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Sinn Fein to protect themselves against the charge of being traitor to their own side. These facts lay behind the current impasse, and he accepted the position now reached by the two governments that the talks should be parked between early March and early June.

9. Emphasising that he was merely thinking aloud, the Taoiseach said that he had been pondering the wisdom of a joint British/Irish statement designed to demonstrate that the two governments were determined to inject a sense of purpose once the talks resumed in June, against the risk that during the two month gap a sense of despair might develop. It would be important to raise expectations amongst all concerned, both the parties to the talks and indeed the opposition parties in both countries. This course might give credibility to the process.

10. The Taoiseach accepted that there might be problems in such a course for the Prime Minister, but wondered whether these would be insuperable in the period after the announcement of the date of the election. Perhaps a statement in early April would make sense? He had not considered what kind of a statement this could be. It might be as modest as an agreed record of a telephone call. As to content, it would simply refer to the resumption of the talks in June and to the fact that the Prime Minister and Taoiseach had agreed that they wished to move matters forward by proposing conclusions for the consideration of the parties.

11. Please treat the preceeding two paragraphs with discretion. The Taoiseach clearly had reached no conclusions. Wally Kirwan emphasised to me afterwards that these ideas had not been discussed with the DFA.

#### NIREX

12. I will report separately a brief exchange on Sellafield and Nirex.

#### Comment

13. This was an extremely friendly discussion which lasted about three quarters of an hour.

*Yours ever,*  
*Veronica.*

Veronica Sutherland  
Ambassador

cc: Mr Lindsey, PS/SofS, NIO - B  
PS/PUS, NIO - B  
Mr Stephens, NIO - B  
Mr Ehrman, PS/SofS FCO - B  
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office (fax)  
Mr Lamont, RID, FCO - B

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