

8. Apr. 1997 8:41

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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

No. 4598 P. 2/5



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*J: JEH or
JH*

Philip Barton Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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received am 8 April
[7] April 1997

[Dear Philip]

SINN FEIN'S ENTRY INTO TALKS

Tuesday morning
My Secretary of State expects to be asked, when he visits Randalstown and East Belfast tomorrow to see Roman Catholic and Baptist churches that have been subjected to arson attacks recently, about how the recent security incidents at Wilmslow, on the M6 and at Aintree affect Sinn Fein's chances of joining the political talks on 3 June if there is a suspension of IRA activities in the meantime. This idea has, of course, received a considerable amount of press recently as a result of comments by the Taoiseach, Dr Mowlam and Senator Kennedy amongst others.

Sir Patrick believes that a robust restatement of the Government's present position - steadfastly refusing to rule in or out any particular timescale but insisting instead of the meeting of clear and credible criteria as to any ceasefire's genuineness - is necessary.

Of course, each successive attack must make it harder for us to be convinced of the genuineness of any subsequently declared ceasefire. Nevertheless, Sir Patrick believes that it would be wrong, as a matter of law, to dismiss the possibility now of Sinn Fein joining the talks on 3 June no matter what the circumstances following a renewed ceasefire might be.

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David Trimble has continued to support our view that it is the meeting of the criteria, not a particular timescale, which matters.

With these points in mind, Sir Patrick believes that the right posture to strike is to echo a position taken by Mr Hume last year that each of these atrocities widens the credibility gap which Sinn Fein and the IRA must close before Sinn Fein can be invited to the political talks. We have worked up the enclosed lines to take centred around this theme. If the Prime Minister is content with them, Sir Patrick suggests that he and other Ministers might draw on them as necessary.

With my minute of 26 March, entitled a 'Possible Announcement by the IRA', I enclosed some provisional lines to take in the event that the IRA announced a suspension of operations. Of course, any announcement would require careful analysis. The full range of options, including an announced unequivocal cessation, remains a possibility. I understand that the Prime Minister was content with the original drafts but we have reworked them slightly, again to take account of the recent security incidents. Further drafts are attached. Again, if the Prime Minister is content with them, they could form a quarry for other Ministers.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to Members of NI, and to Jan Polley in the Cabinet Office.

[Yours ever, Ken]

W K LINDSAY

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