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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

29 May 1997

Dear Gen,

DEALINGS WITH SINN FEIN

Thank you for your letter of 23 May, and the enclosed possible text to be deployed with Sinn Fein at an appropriate moment.

Having seen the draft, the Prime Minister has significant reservations about becoming involved in negotiation of such a text. He believes that this could cause us unnecessary difficulties with the Unionists, and is a process which tempts Sinn Fein into adding conditions and keeping the pressure on us. The Prime Minister's own preference would therefore be to make a speech at an appropriate moment which would offer Sinn Fein entry into the talks on a particular date, assuming an early and satisfactory ceasefire. The speech would also cover Sinn Fein's concerns, but not in agreed language and not necessarily in the kind of terms they have been seeking. He believes that an offer of this kind would put Sinn Fein on the spot and would be very hard for them to refuse, particularly if the Americans and the Irish rode in behind very hard. He thinks President Clinton would certainly be ready to do so.

As far as the content of the draft text is concerned, and leaving aside the desirability of tabling it, the Prime Minister also has some concerns. It is very long and very obviously a joint text with Sinn Fein. More specifically:

- (i) he does not like the formulation in the second tirit of paragraph 2 about whether the people of Northern Ireland prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland. The tirit would be better ended after "...people of Northern Ireland.";
- (ii) the Prime Minister is nervous about the fifth tirit of paragraph 7 on police reform. He thinks this needs to be defined very tightly to make clear that

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we are not talking about radical change to the RUC. The following tiret about legislation against terrorism also needs to be very carefully formulated to make clear that this is not code for becoming softer on terrorists;

- (iii) the Prime Minister is not persuaded of the necessity for the first tiret of paragraph 12 about a possible adjournment of the talks process. He understands that this would make any "decontamination period" easier for Sinn Fein to swallow, but equally it could go down very badly with the Unionists. They could argue that it was unacceptable to be told that they could not continue discussions without Sinn Fein, just because a ceasefire whose genuineness was still to be proved had been declared;
- (iv) the Prime Minister does not like the second sentence of paragraph 16. It is ambiguous and worrying to Unionists to whom decommissioning remains important. The point is covered better in the fourth sentence of the same paragraph.

As I mentioned to you, the Prime Minister would like to discuss this with Dr. Mowlam and one or two others, probably after the call by Senator Mitchell on Monday 2 June. This would also be an opportunity to look forward to the resumption of the talks the following day and the problems likely to come up there. We will be in touch to separately to confirm the time.

I am copying this letter to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yan ee
John

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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