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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AAfaxed via
UKMS 22/6.

From the Private Secretary

22 June 1997

Dear hen,

NORTHERN IRELAND: CONTACTS WITH JOHN HUME

Further to my letter of 22 June from Denver, John Hume called me again today. He had had further contact with Adams. Adams had explained again that Sinn Fein had only put their points in writing because we had not been willing to meet them. Putting them in writing had made them look more like negotiating demands than had been the aim. The only point of real substance was decommissioning. The rest were "housekeeping" points, which could have been sorted out quickly in conversation. Sinn Fein wanted a ceasefire and were positive about the government's document.

Hume added that McGuinness's speech today had also sounded a positive note about the new government's approach. But the legacy of the previous government had been distrust. That was why Sinn Fein had to build the next phase on absolutely solid foundations. On decommissioning, it was positive that the two governments seemed to be sorting this out between them.

Hume went on to make what he described as a personal suggestion. Sinn Fein still wanted to talk to us directly. So he would invite Quentin Thomas and other British officials to his house. He would also invite McGuinness and other Sinn Fein representatives. That way there could be a private meeting. It could result in agreement on a ceasefire. If it did not, he would take full personal responsibility for it, both privately and publicly if necessary.

I pointed out that a meeting with Sinn Fein posed great difficulties after the Lurgan murders. Moreover, as I had already explained to him, we had no more clarification to offer. Hume flew into a rage. It was a waste of time talking to me. He should talk only to the politicians. I should know that the Lurgan murders were not the wish of Sinn Fein but the result of the IRA cell structure. No-one in Britain

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really cared about Northern Ireland and stopping violence. We were on the verge of making history. Etc, etc.

When the storm had blown itself out, I said that I had taken note of his proposal and would ensure the Prime Minister was aware of it. We would no doubt be in touch again.

Comment

Familiar territory: Sinn Fein trying to put the onus back on us, and Hume acting as their chief apologist. When I relayed this exchange to Jim Steinberg, he fully agreed that a further meeting with Sinn Fein was politically out of the question, and that we could not be expected to do more. But that still leaves the question of how to deal with John Hume. The Prime Minister plans to see him on Tuesday, but you may like to consider whether Dr. Mowlam should talk to him in the meantime. In the longer term, Hume's attitude raises again the question whether Hume can ever break free of Sinn Fein's grip. Should we at some stage seek to involve Seamus Mallon and if so how?

I am copying this letter to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir John Kerr (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours ever
John

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.