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MASTER

FILE

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10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

23 June 1997

Dear Ken,

MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH, 23 JUNE

1. The Prime Minister had a brief, hastily arranged meeting with the Taoiseach in the margins of the UNGA Special Session on the Environment in New York. Bruton was accompanied by Wally Kirwan and one other official. Jonathan Powell, Alastair Campbell and I were there on our side.

2. Bruton said that he understood there was one sentence still causing difficulty over decommissioning, in paragraph 6 of the proposed paper. The Irish side could go along with our wording, on condition that the two governments would stand together if in the event the Unionists tried to abuse this. He thought that this had already been agreed in principle between Dr Mowlam and Dick Spring. The Prime Minister said that the wording we had proposed was at the outer limits of what was acceptable with the UUP.

3. Bruton said that the Irish would also be handing over their review of the Bloody Sunday evidence tomorrow to Dr Mowlam. John Major had said that this would be looked at in a serious way. The Prime Minister said that he thought that this was a consistent position of the government.

4. The Prime Minister confirmed that he would be making a statement on Wednesday. We had given Sinn Fein all the clarification they needed. If decommissioning could also be agreed, they would have no shred of an excuse for not declaring a ceasefire. Unfortunately, he still had a feeling that they did not want to do this. But we would move on to make progress anyway.

5. Bruton said that, in his view, it was right to go on rapidly, whatever Sinn Fein's reaction. Irish opinion had been strongly affected by the Lurgan murders. There was therefore readiness to accept forward movement, even without Sinn Fein, but this would not last forever. If we were making a major effort to move forward, that would make problems in the marching season easier to present. He therefore encouraged us to press on.

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6. The Prime Minister asked Bruton for his assessment of Sinn Fein's reaction. Bruton said that, in his personal view the prospects were not good. He did not believe that the Republican movement had yet gone through the radical rethink of its approach needed before violence was definitively abandoned. They still believed in use of the threat of violence, and were obsessed for historical reasons with avoiding a split.

So any ceasefire would be tactical. It might be "sincerely tactical", in the sense that violence would be abandoned if there was a satisfactory settlement. But giving up violence would be contingent on success. For the moment any suspension of violence would only be temporary. He repeated that this was only his personal view. The view of the Irish system was more that Adams was a reasonable man, and separate from the IRA, and that he needed help to overcome the forces of the IRA. The Irish system might now be coming closer to his own view.

7. The Prime Minister asked about the new government's likely view. Bruton said that there was a pragmatic approach within Fianna Fail very similar to the present government's. So he thought they would be fairly tough on Sinn Fein. But there was also a sentimental strand within the party which would press for a different line at some stage.

8. The Prime Minister said that, having handed over the aide memoire, and assuming a deal on decommissioning, if there was a genuine ceasefire, we would have to deliver, although there would be great domestic pressure to ask Sinn Fein for more. But if there was no ceasefire, we would have to move on, though without locking the doors on Sinn Fein.

9. Bruton said that the question was whether the SDLP would go with us in these circumstances. Hume was very attached to bringing in Sinn Fein. He had been in touch with Adams since 1973 and would be very hard to move far without Sinn Fein. It would be important for the new Irish government to put heavy pressure on him. They might be prepared to do that. It was not impossible that Sinn Fein would declare a ceasefire soon, despite the rumours that they preferred to wait until after the marching season. But his worry remained that it would not really be a total cessation. They would always want to retain the option of violence.

10. Kirwan said that Sinn Fein had all the clarification they could have wanted. They had to make up their minds, and there would be no patience with them if they did not. Ray Bourke had told the radio that the process would have to move on without them if necessary. There was much pressure on Sinn Fein, but the Irish had

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failed to move them on consent at the end of the Forum on Peace and Reconciliation, and that had been a relatively easy test to pass.

The Prime Minister said that he wanted to inject more ordinary politics into the situation. The SDLP had been giving legitimacy to Sinn Fein. This was not unreasonable if there was a real chance of getting in Sinn Fein in good faith. If there was not, all others needed to be lined up against Sinn Fein. Kirwan commented that many in the SDLP were very conscious of the damage done to them by the association with Sinn Fein. But Hume would be difficult to move.

The Prime Minister said that despite all the reservations he still wanted to get Sinn Fein into the talks. He thought that the absence of violence might create a different dynamic. Bruton commented that there was a feeling among some in the Republican movement that it would be impossible to return to violence after a second ceasefire. This was not logical but could be right. His concern was more that Sinn Fein saw the settlement as marking the end of the British presence in Ireland. Could they ever settle for anything less?

It was agreed at the end of the meeting that very little would be said to the press about it - just that there had been a brief meeting to review progress and confirm the desire to work together. Unfortunately, Bruton's people immediately told the press that we had agreed on decommissioning. We therefore tried to make clear that the negotiations were elsewhere, and nothing final had been settled (for fear of the UUP reaction). It is not clear how this will come out finally, but it is not likely to improve Trimble's temper.

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

Yours Sincerely,

Deborah Ailes

JOHN HOLMES

Rp.

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