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FAXED

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

16 June 1997

Dear Ken,

IRA MURDER OF RUC OFFICERS

It may be helpful if I record what we have done from here on this. You will have seen the statement the Prime Minister put out here in mid afternoon, but I enclose a copy. In parallel I spoke to Sandy Berger in Washington to express our outrage at what had happened, which was very much what we had feared, and to press the Americans to join in heavy condemnation publicly and privately. I made clear that I did not know where this left our proposed initiative, and that the Prime Minister felt betrayed. Berger said that they would indeed weigh in as we wanted. I subsequently sent him a copy of the Prime Minister's statement, and have since seen the statement issued by the President.

The Prime Minister had kept in touch with the Taoiseach through the European Council meeting in the afternoon, and the two had a brief meeting after the session was over. Bruton was angry. He said that he regarded the murders as a deliberate attempt to intimidate us, and push us into making more concessions in order to make the violence stop. The Sinn Fein leadership was either acting in bad faith, or could not deliver their troops. In either case, the arguments for dealing with them had at least been severely undermined. He regarded the location of the murders as deliberately designed to increase sectarian tension near sensitive marching areas. Sean O'hUiggin, who was also present, nodded throughout this presentation.

The Prime Minister and Taoiseach then spoke to the press together. I assume you will have seen clips on the TV and/or transcripts. The Prime Minister spoke toughly, but the Taoiseach was passionate in his denunciation of the IRA and the Sinn Fein leadership. He ruled out further official meetings with Sinn Fein and said that Ahern's planned meeting with Adams could hardly go ahead in present circumstances.

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We also had various contacts with John Hume. He told us in the afternoon, as he had told Dr Mowlam, that he had spoken to Adams on Monday morning. Adams had said he had been very encouraged by the text we had sent - the best he had ever seen from the British Government - and would be meeting his colleagues that afternoon to discuss their response. Then he, Hume, had heard about the murders. The only explanation he could give was that hardliners in the IRA wanted to prevent another ceasefire. We urged him to condemn the murders, and he subsequently told us he had done so in strong terms on the BBC.

The Prime Minister also spoke to Hume in the early evening. Hume gave the same explanation as he had to Jonathan Powell and myself, and added that he thought there must be a serious split in the IRA ranks. This was the only logical explanation of what had happened. The Prime Minister said that he had tried to deal straight with Sinn Fein. Their reaction was a breach of good faith. We might well conclude that we could not do business with them, and would want to build up the centre, including with Hume. Hume said that he accepted this, but continued to argue that something odd must be going on in IRA ranks. He compared this to the difficulty the Prime Minister had had in turning his party into New Labour - there were bound to be dissidents on the way. He said that he would be speaking to Adams later, and would contact us immediately afterwards.

Hume spoke to me again late this evening, having spoken to Adams. Adams' explanation of the murders had been that, since the struggle was ongoing, these things were bound to happen. Hume had tried to suggest to him that the murders were the work of extremists. Adams had not confirmed this but repeated that such events were bound to happen in the absence of a ceasefire. Adams had gone on to say that he would be talking again to his colleagues about our paper, and would be in touch with Hume again on Wednesday and Thursday with a response. This might be (according to Hume) either that our paper was fine, in which case a ceasefire would follow our statement, or Sinn Fein might ask for more clarification on decommissioning, where the picture was still not clear. Hume said that he had put to them strongly the unacceptability of the murders, and had made clear that Sinn Fein could not expect the Government to go on talking to them in these circumstances.

I said that the position was worse than either Adams or Hume seemed to think. It was far from clear that the paper we had put on the table could still be regarded as operative after the murders. Adams should not think he could simply continue to reflect on our paper as if nothing had happened. The Prime Minister felt angry, disillusioned and betrayed. We had not taken any decisions on the way forward, but the Prime Minister was not prepared to be dealt with in this way. Sinn Fein could not have it both ways. At the very least, I

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thought Hume should get across to Sinn Fein the enormity in our eyes of what they had done. We had given the clearest possible warnings through the Irish and the Americans that any violence now would be completely unacceptable.

Hume argued that we could surely wait a couple of days to see how Sinn Fein reacted. An end to violence in Northern Ireland was now very close. Violence in general was at an historically low level. He had been dealing with the IRA for 25 years and understood how their minds worked. There were bound to be hiccoughs along the road of transformation into a political party (etc etc). I repeated in strong terms that I did not think the Prime Minister would find it acceptable to continue as if nothing had happened. Sinn Fein should not be under any illusions about this. I had heard what Hume had said, and I repeated that we had not yet made decisions about the next steps, but what he had told me about Adams' reactions did not encourage the Prime Minister to think that these were people he could do business with. We went round these circles several times, with increasing irritation on both sides.

Finally, at the Prime Minister's suggestion the European Heads of State and Government issued this evening the attached statement condemning the IRA attack.

Comment

Although I laid it on a little thick for Hume's benefit, you will gather from the above and various telephone conversations that the Prime Minister has severe doubts, in the light of this double murder, whether serious business can be done with Sinn Fein. He does not see how the offer we have made to Sinn Fein can easily be left on the table as it stands. How for example could we defend a period of six weeks after this? At the very least, we would need some further proof of good faith from the IRA/Sinn Fein. He is reflecting on this overnight, and we will be in touch tomorrow. He remains inclined to make a statement in the House on Thursday, and to reveal what we had given Sinn Fein in advance of this incident. But we need to think through our strategy, including what message we should now seek to get across to Sinn Fein; how we would react if they now said they regarded our paper as acceptable and were prepared to declare an immediate ceasefire; and how revealing publicly this week the details of what we have said to them might affect their response and the attitudes of the Irish and the Americans. You will no doubt be reflecting on these issues too.

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

Yours ac
John

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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