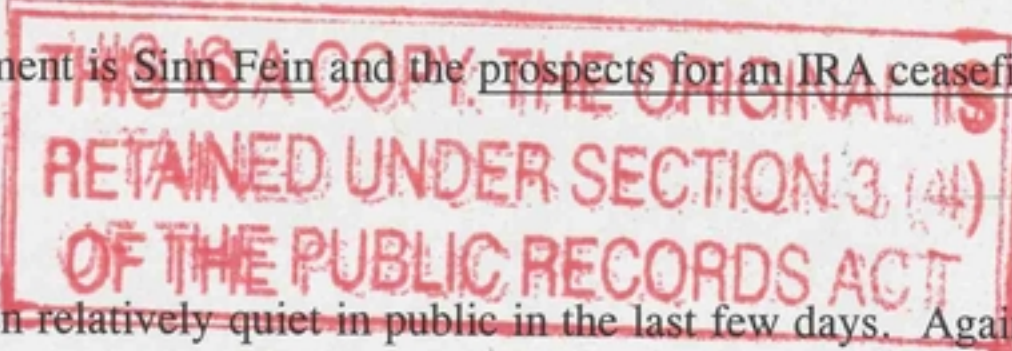


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4. Whether or not the decision has been taken by then, the issue is bound to loom large in your talks with Ahern on Thursday. If we have already said we are letting a march through, he will be bound to press hard for a different decision, not least so he can say he has done so. If we have not decided, he will make our flesh creep with an account of the horrors to follow if we let the march through. He may suggest it could cost us an IRA ceasefire. Deciding the other way immediately after the meeting will look like a direct snub. You will have to be pretty robust whatever the circumstances.
5. The second issue coming to a head is decommissioning. There was a preliminary discussion in the talks today. Further multilateral discussion has been adjourned to 16 July, after Drumcree and 12 July. The gap between the underlying Unionist and Nationalist views is very wide. Whether it can be fudged or bridged by Mitchell and our proposals will depend very much on what happens over Drumcree and Sinn Fein's entry to talks. The NIO are reasonably optimistic. Apparently Trimble was not too bad today.
6. The third element is Sinn Fein and the prospects for an IRA ceasefire.

Sinn
 Fein have been relatively quiet in public in the last few days. Again, Drumcree will have an influence.
7. A fourth issue lurking in the background is Bloody Sunday and the new Irish material. Mo wants both to apologise for what happened and to order a further independent review of the evidence. George Robertson is not totally hostile to this but is obviously worried about the impact on the army, including some
- Tappe with George*

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PREM 49/111 Letter Holmes to the PM dated 01/07/97

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officers on duty in 1972 who are still serving. They are still corresponding. I have made clear to the NIO that this is hugely sensitive territory; that you must be fully consulted before we do or say anything; and that whatever we say or do must take full account of the overall political situation. In my view, we should be wary of an independent review: we cannot control what will come out of it, and could find ourselves in real difficulty.

... The latest development, relevant to most of the above, is a long letter to you from Trimble, attached. He asks a lot of very difficult questions, e.g. when does Sinn Fein's window of opportunity close; has all contact with them ceased; does a ceasefire have to be permanent; how much decommissioning does Mitchell mean? The NIO are mulling these over, but my inclination would be to play the letter long, either delaying a reply or perhaps better taking up the issues in a further meeting with Trimble rather than in writing.

Trimble's tactic, which he started after your Statement, is clearly not to reject anything and thereby put himself in a bad PR position, but simply to question. He has learnt from Sinn Fein that requesting clarification can be an effective game! This is awkward for us, but has the advantage that he is still in the process. He and Adams are both hoping the other will be forced out by internal pressures first. This is a dangerous game of chicken, with us on the highwire as usual, trying to give both sides just enough to keep them in the tent.

I do not think there is anything more we can or should do for the moment. Your meeting with Ahern will be important in preventing the new Irish Government wandering off too far in Sinn Fein's direction. You will have to be tough with him. Thereafter we need to get through Drumcree with as little damage as

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possible. We will have to move very fast to explain our decision, whatever it is, and have our arguments fully marshalled, not least for the US market.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John'.

John Holmes

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