



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

SUBJECT
MASTER

9 June 1997

Dee Ken,

Filed on:

TELEPHONE CALLS TO IRISH LEADERS, 9 JUNE

1. The Prime Minister spoke to Ahern, Bruton and Spring on the telephone today in the wake of the election in Ireland.

Ahern

2. The Prime Minister congratulated Ahern on the outcome of the elections. Ahern congratulated the Prime Minister in turn on the start he had made in Government. He had no doubt of his own ability to put together a Government, since most of the independents were really from Fianna Fail.

3. Discussion turned to Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister said that he found it difficult to understand why the IRA seemed to think that going back to violence, while efforts to get Sinn Fein in were continuing, made any sense. This could throw our efforts off course. Ahern agreed. He would be meeting Adams some time this week, because he would not be able to meet him once he was Taoiseach. He would tell him that he had to deliver a ceasefire for the sake of both governments, and give him a tough message on violence.

4. Ahern raised the prospects for Drumcree. The Prime Minister said that Dr. Mowlam was doing her best to sort this out, but the problem between the Orange Order and the residents seemed intractable. It would be better if Drumcree happened against the backdrop of a broader initiative and a new ceasefire. Ahern agreed. Dr. Mowlam was doing an excellent job. He could support everything she had said about Northern Ireland. He would keep us posted on how he saw the situation, and how his tough message to Adams went down. Meanwhile, he suggested that, before 26 June and his formal election, officials should get together with his people to discuss the prospects. This could be done quietly. There would be a little more room for manoeuvre in discussion before he took office.

HK

- 2 -

5. The Prime Minister said that we would try to do this. He added that he wanted the talks to get underway inclusively and substantively as soon as possible. If this happened and the parties could not agree, the two governments would then have to pitch it to them in a different way. Ahern endorsed this approach. He added that he was keen to improve Anglo/Irish relations, and "do things together".

Bruton

6. The Prime Minister commiserated with Bruton on the outcome of the election, but noted that Fine Gael themselves had done well. It was odd for a party to gain more seats and lose the elections. Bruton said Fine Gael had indeed done well, but Labour had suffered from a hangover from their actions in 1992. Nevertheless, he had no doubt they would come back strongly. He thought that the Prime Minister would get on well with Ahern. He was a pragmatist. But he did worry that the Irish government might get too close to Sinn Fein. They were dangerous people and he doubted their sincerity. They would need very careful watching even after a ceasefire. But if we were too cautious in our approach, we would lose the PR battle.

7. The Prime Minister said that we hoped to make a move soon, but he was alarmed about the idea of more terrorist activity. This could close off various options. If the IRA thought this was the way to bargain with him, they were making a terrible misjudgement.

8. Bruton said that there was little political acumen in the IRA at grassroots level. If Adams and his fellow Sinn Fein leaders had ever wanted to bring these people along (and he was not sure they had), they had not succeeded.

In any case he would ensure that Ahern was aware of the Prime Minister's anxiety about further violence. Meanwhile he looked forward to seeing the Prime Minister in Amsterdam.

Spring

The Prime Minister offered his commiserations. Spring said that if others in the Labour party had done as well as he had, Labour would still be a large party. But, speaking privately, he was not altogether sorry to give up office after 10 continuous years. His one regret was that he would not be able to work with the British Labour party in office. His own party would now have to regroup.

THIS IS A COPY THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 9 (A)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

PREM 49/110 Letter Holmes to Lindsay dated 09/06/97

- 3 -

He suspected that the new coalition would be unstable, since there were huge differences on a range of issues. Ahern was a good politician and a good conciliator but even he would find it difficult to manage this. Meanwhile, no-one was challenging him (Spring) for the leadership of the Labour party.

The Prime Minister wondered what effect the new government would have on the peace process. Spring said that he thought the decommissioning proposals currently under discussion would be accepted by others, if the two governments could agree them. He proposed to tell Ahern that they represented a good deal.

The Prime Minister said that he was worried about renewed IRA violence. Spring sympathised. The republicans were making unfortunate in-roads; for example a known gun runner in his own constituency had got a high vote. In any case he thought it was right to put Sinn Fein on the spot, and make it clear to them that they could not pose as peacemakers while continuing to allow violence. He added that the Prime Minister would find there was absolute cooperation between Britain and Ireland over security. The picture had been transformed in the last few years. There were now no sympathisers with the IRA in the security forces.

Comment:

These calls were useful both in establishing contact with Ahern, and getting across the message to all three about the great concern here about renewed IRA violence. This should get back to Sinn Fein. You will want to consider how best to take up Ahern's suggestion of contacts between officials. I know Veronica Sutherland is keen to do this from her end, but there may be advantage in NIO officials talking too. It may also be sensible for me to make contact with Martin Mansergh.

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

John
ae
John
JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office