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From the Private Secretary

10 October 1996

Dear Ken,

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Summary

Hume sends us new text, incorporating Adams' amendments. Textual analysis. Serious changes. No question we can accept text as it stands, if at all. Options for what to do next. This initiative does not look as if it is going anywhere. Request for advice.

Conversation with Hume

John Hume telephoned this evening to say that he had just received Adams' amendments to the text we had sent him with the Prime Minister's letter. These amendments had been agreed with the IRA. Hume - in high spirits - said that the text looked very good. It contained no new language. All the amendments involved words that we had used before. Much of it Hume had himself suggested to Adams, including on the timeframe. Hume repeated that Adams had agreed with the IRA that, if the Prime Minister published the text he was about to send us, and the IRA were told of publication via him in advance, then Adams and the IRA guaranteed that a permanent cessation would follow. Adams had added that it would be helpful if he could also be told privately, via either Hume or the Irish Government, what we had in mind in the way of confidence-building measures.

I repeated, for the umpteenth time, that this was not a text for negotiation. But we wanted to be as open minded as was reasonable, and would look at the suggested text on its merits. Hume would understand that the scepticism which had already existed in many quarters about this exercise had only been heightened by the recent events in London and Lisburn. I could by no means say that, even if the changes were of the straightforward kind that he

implied, we would be able simply to take them on board and go ahead as before. I could imagine - speaking on an entirely personal basis - that there might, for instance, be pressure for the guarantee of a permanent cessation to be given in writing. But this was getting ahead of things. The first task was to study the proposed amendments. Hume asked if I could give him a preliminary response this evening. I doubted that this would be possible (and he has not in fact come back to me).

Textual analysis

I enclose:

- a clean copy of Hume's text;
- a version annotated in manuscript to show the changes;
- a new clean text showing the Sinn Fein additions, omissions and alterations.

You will want to go through the text in detail, and the following is very much subject to your advice. But it might help Ministers in Bournemouth to have an instant analysis of the Hume language.

The most serious changes, in descending order of importance, seem to be as follows:

Decommissioning: the Hume/Adams language goes well beyond Teahon's suggestion that we simply omit the sentence specifically referring to the Mitchell provision on parallel decommissioning. The Hume text omits the whole second half of our paragraph: i.e.

> "This includes its compromise approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of negotiations (comment: this is the sentence Teahon wanted out). We want to make urgent progress in this area so that the process of decommissioning is not seen as a pre-condition to further progress, but is used to build confidence one step at a time during the negotiations. As progress is made on political issues, even modest mutual steps on decommissioning could help create the atmosphere needed for further steps in a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence."

Perhaps even more important, the Hume text adds language asserting that decommissioning must be resolved without blocking the negotiations. This looks to me like a deal-breaker for the Unionists. I do not see how we could possibly contemplate it.

CONFIDENTIAL

Ceasefire: the Hume text drops all our references to the need for the Government to assess whether a restoration of the ceasefire was unequivocal, and our need to take into account the situation at the time. The omission of the sentence "we would of course need to be sure that any restoration was genuinely unequivocal, particularly in view of events on the ground" is particularly difficult.

Consensus: the Hume text drops the specific reference to the need for the negotiations to proceed by consensus, with the support of parties representing a majority of the Unionist communities (as well as the nationalist). Thus it drops the sentence "The negotiations will operate on the basis of consensus, requiring at least the support of parties representing a majority of both the Unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland".

Timeframe: our reference to our readiness to support a timeframe agreed by the participants is changed to a commitment by both governments to a timeframe agreed between them (no reference to the parties' agreement). We are thus into the realms, so far as the Unionists would be concerned, of an "imposed settlement".

Role of Government and the parties: the Hume text inserts a small amendment which, again, suggests that the governments can impose a settlement (".....we are wholly committed to uphold our responsibility to encourage, facilitate and enable agreement.....").

Summit: we had been contemplating, in response to Teahon's suggestions, the incorporation of a reference to a review plenary in December. The Hume/Adams text goes beyond this by committing both governments to "review progress at regular intervals, including a summit meeting to be held before the end of the year".

Policing: the Hume text replaces our commitment to increasing community identification with policing with language that more explicitly implies that the RUC does not enjoy nationalist support. ("The creation of a policing service which can enjoy the support of the entire community".)

Irish culture: the Hume text introduces language on the lines suggested by Teahon, but at greater length. (difficult)

Internationalisation: the last paragraph of the Hume text includes appreciative references to the contribution of the EU, US and South Africa (the latter as an example of successful conflict resolution). ["welcoming the contribution of the European Union to the resolution of this problem" is a non-starter]

Paramilitary violence: our text ends by referring to the need for a peaceful environment free of all paramilitary violence. The Hume text drops the word

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"paramilitary". This presumably reflects Sinn Fein's line that responsibility for the violence rests not just on the paramilitaries.

Comment

So much for Hume's assurances about no new or difficult language. These changes are obviously highly unsatisfactory. The issue is whether they are so prejudicial that they are not worth the prize even of a permanent cessation (if - a massive if - we could rely on the Sinn Fein guarantee). You will have your own views. My initial reaction is that a significant number of proposed changes are deal-breakers:

- we could not possibly sign up to the proposition that decommissioning should not be allowed to block the negotiations;

- we could not tacitly accept that Sinn Fein should continue to reject the notion of parallel commissioning;

- we could not commit to a timetable agreed by governments only. We can do what we can to progress things. But ultimately it is up to the parties;

- bearing in mind that Trimble has read the text, I would not care to explain to the Unionists why we had omitted the reference to the need for majority Unionist support.

Next steps

[I think "equal treatment for the Irish language & culture" is also very difficult Alex.]

We have said that we are not prepared to negotiate our text. But even if we were, it is hard to see how we could even get close to the Hume/Adams version. (I take it as read that we could not accept their text as it stands.) So what are our options?

(i) not to publish at all;

(ii) to go ahead and simply publish the text we gave Hume, knowing that it will not secure a renewed ceasefire;

(iii) to publish a text that tries to take on board Teahon's amendments, in the hope that this will strengthen Irish and US government support, but again knowing that it will not secure a ceasefire;

(iv) to publish a text that tries additionally to include the least neuralgic of the Hume/Adams amendments.

In present circumstances, I would tend to favour option (i), explaining to the Irish and Americans that, in the light of the London arms finds and the Lisburn outrage, plus the nature of the Hume/Adams amendments, we had sadly concluded that there was no future in taking this initiative further. But there are also arguments for option (iii) in particular, which you will want to consider.

As I say, these are very much preliminary thoughts. I should welcome your advice.

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

Yours ever,

Edward Oakden

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