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Der Sohn

PPs/BF

HUME TEXT: IRISH SUGGESTIONS

Thank you for your two letters of 30 September, giving Paddy Teahan's and John Hume's reactions to the text sent to Hume.

Text

We have said the text is not for negotiation. Nevertheless, it is our text and if there are changes which seem helpful we can make them, providing always the text remains clearly within the ambit of existing policy.

On that basis, Teahan's suggestions (ii) - (iv) are straightforward and could be incorporated without risking criticism:

- a reference to the three strands would be entirely orthodox;
- the Irish suggestion on timeframe steers clear of an imposed timeframe, while beefing up somewhat the encouragement to the parties to agree a timeframe. That causes us no difficulties - indeed, the Government would not wish to pretend that it is neutral on whether the process moves forward speedily or slowly. (The publication today of our proposal on decommissioning also means we can now disclose December as the time we have proposed for a review plenary);

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- a neutral reference to the cultural traditions of both communities is also unexceptional and in line with existing policy commitments, although Teahon's suggested text could do with some amendment.

None of these could be read as making significant changes to the text. But we think there is a good case for taking these points on board - as in the amended text attached. Doing so will help keep the Irish Government (and, through them, the US) on board. They can be defended as in line with existing policy. They will not unbalance the text as a whole.

In addition, we have had a further thought on the text ourselves, which we think will improve it. As it stands, the text has no reference to the loyalist ceasefire. Loyalists think they have not received enough credit for maintaining their ceasefire. In the wake of the comments by loyalist prisoners on Monday, a positive reference would seem both topical and sensible. We have suggested a short addition to the third paragraph of the text for this purpose - also incorporated in the draft attached. This has the added advantage of being a change to the text which does not emanate from an Irish suggestion.

Teahon's first suggestion, on decommissioning, raises deeper issues. He is somewhat disingenuous to describe his suggested deletion as purely tactical. While Irish Ministers are signed up to our view that Mitchell's compromise approach clearly involves some decommissioning during negotiations, some Irish officials have advanced the view that paragraph 34 of the Mitchell report only recommends that parties should consider such an approach. Sinn Féin may therefore hope that in negotiations they could get away with simply discussing the subject without there ever being any actual decommissioning.

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Teahon's analysis may well be right: Sinn Féin will have extreme difficulty in signing up to parallel decommissioning up front. The best hope of securing any actual decommissioning does seem to lie in first securing some political progress. But, equally, we must not appear to confirm Sinn Féin's hope that they could get away with only discussing decommissioning, when we know that is wholly unrealistic given unionist positions (and our own).

The sentence Teahon suggested we delete makes clear our view of what Mitchell recommended. It is true that it does not appear in the joint proposal now circulated to all parties - that is because the joint proposal quotes the whole of paragraphs 34 and 35 of the Mitchell report. That is not possible in this article. Simple deletion is unacceptable because it would send the wrong message. But it would be possible to stick even more closely to the text of the Mitchell report, so making it more difficult for the Irish to cavil at the paragraph. It might read as follows:

"Among the crucial issues is decommissioning. The opening plenary will address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning of illegal arms. In their report, the International Body said the parties should consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all party negotiations. We support this compromise approach. So we, along with the Irish Government, will be looking for the commitment of all participants to work constructively during the negotiations to implement all aspects of the International Body's report. We want to make urgent progress in this area ..."

In the attached text, this is incorporated in square brackets as an alternative to the existing paragraph.

If we do make any of these changes to the text sent by Hume, we should do so entirely on our own account and not show the text outside of Government for further comment until it is sent for publication.

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Timing

As you say, publishing the text when the UUP are in rejectionist mode carries dangers (although last week Mr Trimble was taken through the main points without registering concern). It is not clear when - if at all - there will be a better environment.

Hume says he expects Sinn Féin's definitive response next Monday. Since the reason for any article is to answer what questions Sinn Féin have, there is a case for waiting to hear their response. But assuming next week is ruled out, that delays publication until the week beginning 14 October, with some increased risk of a leak (although there are indications Sinn Féin are themselves keen to avoid early publication and so would seem unlikely to leak it). Having got Sinn Féin's response, we would also have to decide how to deal with it.

So there is a choice between publication this week - say, Thursday or Friday - or leaving it for some 10 days or so. We shall need to keep this under close review and await further word from Mr Hume.

As to Teahon's musings as to whether Sinn Féin might declare a ceasefire and then try not to enter the talks, that would seem a perverse strategy. It was the strain of maintaining a ceasefire while there was no political process for Sinn Féin to participate in, which proved unbearable in February. If Sinn Féin decide they don't want to be in the talks, then the IRA leadership looks to have little to gain by declaring a ceasefire. But other parts of Teahon's thesis look more plausible. The SDLP is very worried about remaining in negotiations without any ostensible sign of progress - Mallon has talked in public of the end of October as a deadline. They are also fearful that Sinn Féin will overtake them electorally

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- though the evidence is by no means clear cut. It may well be that the Sinn Féin leadership reckon a ceasefire would improve their electoral prospects - but whether they could deliver one in a vacuum, without a political process in being, is uncertain.

A copy goes to William Ehrman and Jan Polley.

Yours ever,

Ken

W K LINDSAY

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(Possible changes underlined)

(1 October 1996)

This Government has made clear its approach to the search for peace in Northern Ireland on many occasions. But we continue to be asked about this or that aspect, particularly about the multi-party negotiations which started on 10 June in Belfast. There has been continued speculation about a new IRA ceasefire, despite the latest huge arms and explosives find in London. This has renewed questions about what effect this would have on the negotiations, and our approach to these negotiations. It may therefore be helpful to spell out our position again.

The negotiations have one overriding aim: to reach an overall political settlement, achieved through agreement and founded on consent. They will address all the issues relevant to such a settlement within the three strands. Inclusive in nature, they involve both Governments and all the relevant political parties with the necessary democratic mandate and commitment to exclusively peaceful methods.

The prospects for success in these negotiations will be much greater if they take place in a peaceful environment. The loyalist ceasefire has made an important contribution. It made it possible for the loyalist parties to join the negotiations. They are now playing their part in shaping Northern Ireland's future, as I acknowledged when I met their leaders in July.

Under the legislation setting up the talks, if the Government considered that there was an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, Sinn Féin would be invited to nominate a team to participate in the negotiations. We would of course need to be sure that any restoration was genuinely unequivocal, particularly in view of events on the ground. Beyond that, both the British and Irish Governments are agreed that these negotiations are without preconditions.

It is equally clear that, to be successful, the negotiations must be based on exclusively democratic and peaceful means. There must be no recourse to the threat (actual or implied) or use of violence or coercion. So, on entering the negotiations, each participant needs to make clear their total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the Report of the International Body chaired by Senator George Mitchell. The parties in the talks have all done just that already.

The range of issues on which an overall agreement will depend means that the negotiations will be on the basis of a comprehensive agenda. This will be adopted by agreement. Each participant will be able to raise any significant issue of concern to them, and receive a fair hearing for those concerns, without this being subject to the veto of any other party. Any aspect can be raised, including constitutional issues and any other matter which any party considers relevant. No negotiated outcome is either predetermined or excluded in advance or limited by anything other than the need for agreement.

Among the crucial issues is decommissioning. So the opening plenary will address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning of illegal arms. At that stage, we, along with the Irish Government, will be looking for the commitment of all participants to work constructively during the negotiations to implement all aspects of the International Body's report. This includes its compromise approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of negotiations.

[ALTERNATIVE PARAGRAPH]: Among the crucial issues is decommissioning. The opening plenary will address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning of illegal arms. In their report, the International Body said the parties should consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all party negotiations. We support this compromise

approach. So we, along with the Irish Government, will be looking for the commitment of all participants to work constructively during the negotiations to implement all aspects of the International Body's report.]

We want to make urgent progress in this area so that the process of decommissioning is not seen as a precondition 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.

It is important to emphasise that all parties are treated equally in the negotiations in accordance with the scale of their democratic mandate. No party has an undemocratic advantage. 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. But no one party can prevent them continuing by withdrawing from the negotiations.

It is essential that all participants negotiate in good faith, seriously address all areas of the agreed agenda and make every effort to reach a comprehensive agreement. For their part, the two Governments are committed to ensure that all items on the comprehensive agenda are fully addressed. They will do so themselves with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise.

For our part, we are wholly committed to upholding, so far as we can, our responsibility to facilitate agreement in the negotiations. This must be based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions. We want to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement.

We are also determined to see these negotiations through successfully, as speedily as possible. This is in line with the hopes and aspirations of people in both the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. These have already given momentum to a process

which will always have its difficulties. We have already proposed that a plenary meeting should be held in December to take stock of progress in the negotiations as a whole. We will encourage any effort by the parties to agree a timeframe and will seek to ensure that any agreed timeframe adopted by the participants is met.

Meanwhile we are committed to raising confidence, both through the talks and through a range of other measures alongside them. The International Body's report itself proposes a process of mutual confidence-building.

So we will continue to pursue social and economic policies based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equity of treatment and parity of esteem irrespective of political, cultural or religious affiliation or gender. We support, with equal respect, the varied cultural traditions of both communities. We are committed to increasing community identification with policing in Northern Ireland.

It is worth recalling that, in response to the ceasefires of Autumn 1994 and the changed level of threat, we undertook a series of confidence-building measures. These included changed arrangements for release of prisoners in Northern Ireland under the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995, security force redeployments, a review of emergency legislation and others. If the threat reduces again, the opportunity for further confidence-building measures returns.

But confidence-building is a two-way street. Support for the use of violence is incompatible with participation in the democratic process. An end to punishment beatings and other paramilitary activities, including surveillance and targeting, would demonstrate real commitment to peaceful methods and help build trust.

The opportunity for progress has never been greater. The negotiations are widely supported internationally and benefit from independent chairmen from the USA, Canada and Finland. They also have the overwhelming support of people throughout these islands. They want them to take place in a peaceful environment, free of all paramilitary violence. That is our aim too.

The Cardinal

I am writing on the day of your retirement as Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland to say how greatly I have valued your friendship and counsel during the last six years, and to express my appreciation for all you have done in the cause of peace.

In good times and bad, you have given the people of Ireland encouragement and hope. You have ensured that, against the clamour of the search for a political solution, the Christian message is heard with all its power and clarity. Your personal contribution has been immense, and is typified by the characteristically forthright nature of your comments at your recent installation, which you were kind enough to send me.

I would like to send you every time with the best wishes for a long and happy retirement, and I am sure you will be able to enjoy the leisure moments that I know you had to enjoy when you became Primate.

*With warm regards
Your friend
John Paul*