



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

S 157./96

From the Private Secretary

31 October 1996

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*Dear Gen,*

**HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE**

Paddy Teahon rang me on the secure link between London and Dublin this evening.

Their assessment was that a General Army Convention was now imminent. It would have two purposes. The first was to remove the bar on Sinn Fein candidates taking up their seats at Westminster if they were successful in elections. The second was to agree a new ceasefire.

Teahon said that Hume had meanwhile been in touch with the Irish to say that he had got a form of words from Adams to use about a ceasefire. The Irish had not yet seen it, but believed it contained references to "no first strike", and also expressions of regret for past attacks. The second of these was apparently more difficult than the first.

Teahon added that Tim Dalton had told him of a conversation earlier in the day with Sir John Chilcot, when Sir John had said we were "moving towards decisions". The Taoiseach had asked Teahon to tell me, in the light of this, that he would want to talk to the Prime Minister again before any final decisions were taken. The Irish would want to bridge the differences between us over wording and terms of the ceasefire if they possibly could. As we would know, the Taoiseach had always been amongst those most sceptical about Sinn Fein's intentions, but he now believed a ceasefire could be achieved if we got the wording right.

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Teahon added, at a later stage in the conversation, that there was also a feeling that the IRA might declare a ceasefire soon whether or not we responded to Hume's efforts. Sinn Fein would then turn up at Stormont demanding to be admitted to the talks. That would create a very difficult situation.

Teahon made clear that the Irish were now firmly attached to the kind of approach they had put to us yesterday, whereby Sinn Fein would be allowed to enter the talks to declare their allegiance to the Mitchell principles. The chairman would then go into a series of bilaterals to assess how this should be played, while the IRA and Sinn Fein could be measured against the Mitchell principles. Teahon signalled that there could be a real problem between us if we were not prepared to go along with this kind of approach.

I said that we also believed a GAC was imminent. However our impression, from our evidence, was that it was more concerned with restructuring of various kinds than the points which Teahon had mentioned. Our own intelligence continued to point away from a ceasefire, whatever Adams' own intentions. (I rang Teahon later to say that later information I had seen tended to confirm the Westminster point at least.)

As far as Hume/Adams was concerned, we were waiting for Hume to come back to us. Our next steps would depend on what kind of words he came back with. We would want thereafter to move quickly to bring this exercise to a conclusion. The Prime Minister would of course be in touch with the Taoiseach again before we did anything. However, we would be very wary of getting into further negotiations about texts. We had just about reached our bottom line.

As far as Sinn Fein entering the talks was concerned, our views would obviously be conditioned by whatever the IRA and Sinn Fein said at the time. But I found it difficult to imagine circumstances in which we would think it right to allow them into the talks the day after a ceasefire. This would be impossible to square with what we had said already and what we believed was right. It seemed to me also impossible to square with what the Irish had said, for example the Taoiseach's own very strong comments in the Dail. The picture could of course be changed by some dramatic new statements from the IRA and Sinn Fein if and when they declared a ceasefire, but short of that we believed that time was inevitably needed to assess the genuineness of a ceasefire, even if we were not to insist on an explicit period. Apart from anything else, if Sinn Fein came into the talks quickly, there was no doubt the Unionists would walk out. It was difficult to see how that could help.



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Teahon stuck to his guns. We should not see the issue of whether Sinn Fein were in or out of the talks in black and white. The Irish proposal covered our position satisfactorily, in their view. Sinn Fein would not really be in the talks and we would be in an excellent position to monitor them properly. I responded that there were certain political realities here and it was unreasonable to expect us simply to ignore them. The fact was that the Irish were asking us to admit Sinn Fein to the talks the day after a ceasefire. But Sinn Fein could change the terms of the debate. We were willing to see what words they came back with.

We batted this backwards and forwards a few more times without a result, and agreed to be in touch again when we knew what Hume had to say.

Comment

This was a less friendly exchange than usual with Teahon. He had clearly been given fierce instructions by the Taoiseach. I was equally clear that we were not in a position to give ground in the way the Irish wanted. If the IRA are really heading for a ceasefire, I fear we are also heading for a clash with the Irish, short of dramatic news brought by Hume.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

*Jan*  
*John*

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq  
Northern Ireland Office

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