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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

30 October 1996

Dear Ken,

HUME\ADAMS INITIATIVE

... Paddy Teahon spoke to me this afternoon, and subsequently faxed me the attached ideas on how to handle Sinn Fein after the new ceasefire. He said that these ideas had been floated in a meeting between the Tanaiste and Sir Patrick Mayhew this afternoon. The Irish side had been depressed by the clearly negative response.

After Teahon had described what the Irish had in mind in more detail (I had not seen the text at that stage) I said that I was not surprised by our response. The Irish were effectively saying that Sinn Fein could join the talks as soon as there was a new ceasefire. This was not credible and indefensible politically here.

Teahon said that what the Irish were suggesting was effectively a situation where Sinn Fein were neither fully in, nor out, and where we would be able to use their commitment to the Mitchell principles against them. I said that I could see the logic in this but the fact remained that, if Sinn Fein came into the talks immediately after a ceasefire, this would not be credible and most others would walk out.

Teahon said that this would not necessarily be the case. Under the Irish proposal, there would be no plenaries until the chairman had finished bilateral consultations with the other parties. This process could be spun out, and no-one would have to sit down with Sinn Fein until they had demonstrated good faith. In the end, we just agreed to differ.

Teahon made two other points:

- (i) the Irish were increasingly worried about where the talks would go once the current exchanges about decommissioning had come to a conclusion. This was quite irrespective of Sinn Fein's position;

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- (ii) this concern was particularly acute because the Irish were now convinced that Trimble had no intention of negotiating seriously on the three strands under any circumstances. His remarks to his Party Conference last week had been profoundly depressing, and had seemed to rule out any prospect of engagement on Strand 2.

Responding to the second point, I said that this was unduly pessimistic. Trimble had told us that he was prepared to negotiate seriously, if it was clear that Sinn Fein could not simply walk into the talks through a new phoney ceasefire. Once that was clear, he would agree to set aside decommissioning and move on to the three strands. Teahon said that Trimble had not given any such signal to the Irish, and they did not believe he was ready to do it. I commented that Trimble's view was that the Irish and the SDLP were not prepared to negotiate seriously without Sinn Fein, and were therefore obsessed with trying to get Sinn Fein into the talks. Teahon denied this. If the Irish had believed that Trimble was ready to negotiate seriously, no-one was readier than they were to negotiate.

We left it at that, but there is clearly a major perception problem here. It is crucial because it affects Irish readiness to carry on without Sinn Fein if the Hume/Adams initiative leads nowhere.

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



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.
Northern Ireland Office

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