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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

23 October 1996

From the Private Secretary

Dee Hen,

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Following my letter earlier today about discussions with Lake, Teahon rang me this evening. His immediate concern was today's Irish media interest in whether a new hurdle was being erected before Sinn Fein could enter the talks. He referred to this morning's "stupid" Irish Independent story, and the way Spring had been forced to react to it. Irish television was now trying to contrast the apparent Irish position with what the Prime Minister had said in the House of Commons.

Teahon claimed that the Irish had not inspired any of this, and were trying to damp it down as far as they could. He hoped we would also avoid feeding the story. I said that we had certainly said nothing to inspire it from our end, and would do our best to avoid any suggestion that there was an argument between us and the Irish about such things as time periods after an IRA ceasefire.

Teahon went on to say that, following the discussion in the last couple of days, the four Coalition leaders would be meeting tomorrow afternoon to discuss the way forward. They would start from the position that there was a major prize ie a new IRA ceasefire within reach, and that a way through the present difficulties needed to be found. There was concern that the present discussions should be drawn to a conclusion rapidly, otherwise there would be a temptation on the part of some to conclude that there was no real desire to find a solution.

Teahon said that he did not want to speculate on what the outcome of the meeting might be. There was a range of views, from those who said that the issues were too important to mess around with arguments over words to those who were deeply sceptical of IRA and Sinn Fein intentions. He thought that the result would probably be a proposition to be put to us. He hinted (no more)

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

that the Irish might suggest that a time period after a new ceasefire could be agreed privately, rather than put up in lights. If it was too upfront, Sinn Fein might feel obliged to reject it. He was unwilling to elaborate any further, but promised to ring me tomorrow evening with a read out of the meeting.

Comment

Teahon did not make any mention of a telephone call between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, although he may do so after tomorrow's meeting. If Irish thinking does go in the direction hinted at by Teahon, I see considerable difficulties. I do not see how a time period could in practice be private, not least because the entry terms for Sinn Fein following a ceasefire will have to be transparent in the talks context. I will make this point to Teahon if I get the chance tomorrow morning.

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

*Ym eve
John*

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