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FILE

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From the Private Secretary

18 September 1997

Dear Sir,

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister and Dr Mowlam met briefly this morning to discuss the way ahead. It may be useful to record the main points:

- Dr Mowlam stressed the need to ensure that Trimble did not walk out of the talks again after the meeting on Tuesday 23 September to consider throwing out Sinn Fein. The Prime Minister said he would be talking to the Taoiseach soon, and would no doubt need to speak to Trimble again.
- Dr Mowlam suggested that the Prime Minister might see John Hume in the next 3 or 4 weeks, to make a gesture in the SDLP direction.
- It was agreed that we should continue to resist Trimble's insistence that de Chastelain should chair Strand 2, but that it would help him swallow the Joint Chairmanship arrangement if de Chastelain could at least chair one or two meetings early on. Mitchell should be worked on further to this effect.
- The Prime Minister might use his next visit to Northern Ireland to meet Sinn Fein. Dr Mowlam suggested that one way of doing this might be a social occasion to meet all the talks participants together. (This needs further careful thought.)
- Bloody Sunday: Dr Mowlam said she was keen to have an agreement about how to deal with this, as a CBM for the nationalists to be deployed at the right moment. The Prime Minister made clear that he was very cautious, particularly in the short term. He would not want to reopen the Widgery Enquiry in any way, although he might be able to contemplate a


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suitably worded expression of regret/apology at some stage. Dr Mowlam said she wanted to review ~~a~~ least the Widgery process, if not necessarily its conclusions. The Prime Minister remained cautious but said that this should be pursued discreetly with MOD and Home Office Ministers, rather than through IN, at least at this stage.

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

Yours sincerely


JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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