

**SUBJECT
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From the Private Secretary

29 October 1997

Dee Hen.

NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Following his meeting with the SDLP, the Prime Minister had a brief discussion with Dr Mowlam about the talks process and Bloody Sunday. Jonathan Stephens and I were also there.

Talks process

2. The Prime Minister said that it would be hard to make the Ulster Unionists negotiate seriously in the talks, but they needed to be persuaded to engage. He would need to talk to Trimble again. His own view was that agreement would never be reached through the formal negotiating structure. We would need to negotiate the main lines of a deal ourselves outside the talks. Ultimately it might be best if the UUP would table a proposal, which the SDLP could then agree to. But this would obviously require a lot of preparation.

3. Jonathan Stephens said that the ability of the parties to do business between themselves should not be underestimated. There had been progress through this method in the 1991/92 talks, and even on minor issues in the present process. It was also necessary to keep the process in being for Sinn Fein and the Loyalists. Dr Mowlam said that she had no difficulty with the Prime Minister talking to Trimble again, if necessary without her, but she would prefer that promises of concessions to him were not made. These were often very difficult to carry through without creating other serious problems.

4. It was agreed that the Prime Minister should see Trimble again soon, to tell him to engage in the process. The Prime Minister and Dr Mowlam would also need a proper session on the details of a settlement with Hume and Mallon.

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He was also prepared to see Sinn Fein in Downing Street before Christmas, and it might be wise for him to see Paisley before then too. In general, we needed to do more work both on how to produce the ultimate deal, and how to crank up momentum in the talks again in the meanwhile. The process should not be allowed to drift.

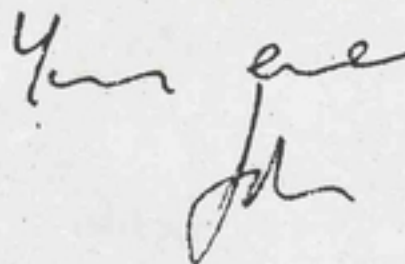
Bloody Sunday

5. Dr Mowlam said that she did not believe it was possible to leave the issue unresolved for as long as the Prime Minister would like. Failure to act before the next anniversary in January would be very hard to sustain. Moreover the Irish would publish their material, which would leave us on the back foot. She did not herself believe that an apology would be enough to defuse the issue. She continued to prefer a proper review of Widgery but, if that was not possible, there ought to be some sort of half-way house.

6. The Prime Minister said that his position remained that he was prepared to contemplate an apology, which could be quite fulsome, but he did not want a review. He did not see the point, and feared the consequences.

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I am copying this to Tom McKane (Ministry of Defence) and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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10/10/97
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE HOME
DEPARTMENT

PREM 49/119

letter dated 29/10/97

Cindy to
Holmes