

CONFIDENTIAL

4693
POLITICAL AFFAIR
DIVISION
30 OCT 1996
N.I.O. BELFAST

82 Dec 9

B18

FROM: D J R HILL
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM
29 OCTOBER 1996

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Priestly - B
Mr Whysall - B
Ms Mapstone - B

1 Mr McNeill
2 Dr Smyth

David Hill "proposed"

this with Peter Bell and me.

Apart from his remarks about a possible Loyalist withdrawal from
the process, I was generally content for
it to go forward. Q.T. however, is not so
sure! C301,0

THE "PEACE" PROCESS

The following points are clearly already well taken but it may be helpful to set down some of the dangers which might flow from too ready an acceptance of the proposition apparently being urged upon us by Sinn Fein, John Hume, the Irish Government and the US Administration - that we should be prepared to allow Sinn Fein to enter the talks within a couple of months on the back of a relatively weak definition of what constitutes an "unequivocal" restoration of the ceasefire.

2. Any attempt to engineer Sinn Fein into the talks on the terms they are currently offering would give rise to a serious risk of destroying the talks process and ending the Loyalist ceasefire. The DUP, the UKUP and the Unionist "yellow press" would have a field day, arguing that their every prediction had been proved true. They would claim that the readiness of the two Governments to pay any price to secure a ceasefire, and the implication that further concessions would inevitably be made to Sinn Fein during the negotiations to secure a maintenance of the ceasefire, had been

CONFIDENTIAL

POLDEVT/1617

CONFIDENTIAL

fully demonstrated. There is nothing to suggest that Mr Trimble and the UUP would be able or willing to stick with the talks process in those circumstances. In fact their declared positions and likely political reactions point completely the other way: Mr Trimble would probably seek to out-herd Dr Paisley. If all three Unionist parties effectively retire from the talks process the Loyalist parties could not hold on. In any event, the Loyalist paramilitaries would take the message from the Governments' reaction to the Sinn Fein ceasefire that it is, after all, violence and the threat of violence which pays off. The Loyalist ceasefire would be a casualty of any decision to accept an IRA ceasefire on Sinn Fein's present terms. ?

3. We could well end up with an IRA ceasefire but no obvious mechanism for moving towards a political settlement with any chance of proving widely acceptable, coupled with massive Unionist alienation and no Loyalist ceasefire. HMG would be stuck in the middle with any political movement being castigated by Unionists as a surrender to the threat of violence and any failure to "respond imaginatively" to an IRA ceasefire being criticised by the Irish and the Americans, and possibly the SDLP. That would give rise to enormous political strains in the short term and be unsustainable in the medium to long term. Once they had milked the situation and if there was insufficient progress towards their objectives, the IRA might go back to war, exploiting the "justification" of Loyalist terrorism and British Government footdragging.

4. Sinn Fein has had years to study the detailed impact of their presence (eg in Council Chambers) on Unionist politicians. They are quite capable of predicting the likely sequence of events and calculating that their present offer would achieve a range of strategic goals (restoring the nationalist consensus, splitting HMG from the Unionists, enabling them to present themselves to the electorate as the peace party with the hope of sustaining or even expanding their political support) without coming close to forcing them to adjust to the painful realities of a democratic political process.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

5. We are on the horns of a tactical dilemma because the Irish, despite Mr Bruton's instincts, and the Americans appear to have accepted Sinn Fein's false prospectus at face value. But in responding to it we should bear in mind the serious potential downside of being seen to make further damaging concessions to Sinn Fein, and be clear about our strategic objectives.

6. All this underlines the case made in Monday's letter to No 10 for

- seeking a range of "confidence building" statements etc from Sinn Fein/IRA before we signal a readiness to deploy the "Hume/Adams" text (especially if that makes no explicit reference to a time interval between any restoration of the ceasefire and an invitation to the talks);
- spelling out the criteria we would apply in determining whether any purported restoration was unequivocal; and/or
- reaching some understanding on the time interval which would apply (even if that were expressed positively in terms of the steps which might be taken after a restoration in preparation for Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations).

It is very interesting that Mr Hume appears to have acknowledged the need for movement on some at least of these dimensions and felt that this would not be undeliverable. If we can assemble a package on these lines we may just be able to sell the proposition to the UUP and provide them (and us) with sufficient cover to withstand the predictable withering criticisms from the DUP and UKUP.

7. If we are to avoid the political/strategic risks summarised above that package will need to be pretty robust. That message is obviously well understood within the NIO and the Government more generally. However there may be something in the material in

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

paragraphs 2-4 above which we could draw on in helping to persuade the Irish and the Americans to support us in insisting on quite a lot more than a simple reiteration of the ceasefire formula of August 1994.

(signed)

**D J R HILL
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM
CB x22317**

cc
PS/Secretary of State (SAL) - 2
PS/Sir John Wheeler (SAL) - 2
PS/Michael Amos (SAL) - 2
PS/Malcolm Ross (DMS, DCSAL) - 2
PS/Barrington Danton (DMS, DANTON) - 2
PS/PUS (SAL) - 2
PS/Sir David Fell - 2
Mr Thomas (SAL) - 2
Mr Steele - 2
Mr Ball - 2
Mr Leach - 2
Mr Watkins - 2
Mr Wood (SAL) - 2
Mr Weston - 2
Mr Priestly - 2
Mr Hill (SAL) - 2
Mr Lavery - 2
Mr Macpherson
Mr Perry - 2
Mr Stephens - 2
Mr Sherucha - 2
Mr Hapstone - 2
Mr Whysall (SAL) - 2
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via RID) - 2
Mr Dickinson, TAU - 2
Mr Lamont, RID - 2
WPA Dublin - 2
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - 2
Mr Campbell-Bennet - 2
Mrs McKelly (SAL) - 2

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

DATE: 25 OCTOBER 1994

25

SECRET

A Political Committee meeting at 11.00 am was attended by all parties other than Alliance, and in a generally co-operative atmosphere the PM announced that Paisley's motion calling for the dissolution of the Committee was now formally withdrawn.

POLDEVT/1617

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

25/10/94