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From: John Holmes
Date: 15 February 1998

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mo has been talking to the Irish and the SDLP, though Hume has done one of his disappearing acts. Mallon was good on the media yesterday, making clear that this was a defining moment for Sinn Fein – Adams had to choose between politics and violence.

The Irish were a bit wobbly yesterday. The Taoiseach saw Adams in the morning. Adams subsequently made a statement disavowing all murders. The Irish asked Mo whether this was good enough to change our mind about throwing out Sinn Fein. She told them it was virtually meaningless and no good.

Teahon rang me later to clarify whether there was anything Sinn Fein could say now which would make a real difference. I said that short of condemning the two murders, disassociating themselves from them and denying those responsible for the murders had been authorised, I did not see that we could move away from throwing out Sinn Fein. Even a statement of this kind would be difficult to do much with, given the strength of our evidence. On the other hand, it would affect the atmosphere in which the discussion took place on Monday and would make it easier to let them back in later, perhaps more quickly.

Teahon accepted this readily enough. His concern was not to arouse false expectations on the part of Sinn Fein. They had been conditioning Sinn Fein, reasonably successfully, to accept the inevitable, but this process had been rather

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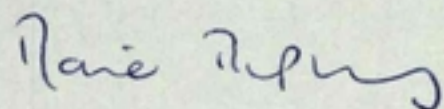
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disrupted by suggestions that a new statement by Sinn Fein could make a real difference. I said that, short of really dramatic new words by Sinn Fein, new statements by them were only making our position more difficult.

I have passed this on to Mo, and encouraged her to stand firm. I think this is ok for the moment, and there is no need for you to call the Taoiseach. I will come back to you later if the picture changes.

Meanwhile, four members of the IRA have now been charged with the murder of the Loyalist commander. This should help our case on Monday, although of course it is difficult to prove that they are "members" of the IRA, and the case itself is now sub-judice.



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JOHN HOLMES

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