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From the Principal Private Secretary

30 January 1998

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MEETING WITH THE DUP, 29 JANUARY

Dr. Paisley, Peter Robinson and Nigel Dodds called on the Prime Minister for what became almost an hour. They were friendly, especially Paisley, but as usual very critical of the Government.

Bloody Sunday/Inquiries

Paisley referred back to the question he had just asked in the House about Bloody Sunday. He acknowledged the distinction the Prime Minister had drawn between what the State did and what terrorist groups did. His point was that the Irish Government had contributed hugely to the revival of the IRA through their actions in 1970. This was a parallel case, which merited an inquiry. On Bloody Sunday itself, he had listened to the comments of the relatives, calling for a full international inquiry, the tearing up of Widgery and the prosecution of all those responsible. This did not seem to him dignified, and was in fact the Republican agenda.

Paisley went on that the point about the State's actions also applied to the inquiry into the death of Billy Wright in the Maze Prison. There were many serious questions to be raised about how this had been allowed to happen, and the current inquiry would never get to the truth. Peter Robinson echoed this. He had led a delegation to see Narey. Narey had told them openly that he was doing what he was told, and that no heads would roll. It was quite clear he would not get at the truth. Many in the Unionist community believed the State was culpable, or at best complicit, in Billy Wright's murder. (He gave various details of the circumstances surrounding the murder).

The Prime Minister said that we were determined to get at the truth. It was best to wait to see what came out of the inquiry. Adam Ingram explained

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some of the circumstances, for example why the decision had been taken to put the LVF and INLA in the same block.

Paisley added that there was another equivalent to Bloody Sunday on the Protestant side. Two of his own men had been shot by the Army in the Shankill Road, but there had been no redress and no public inquiry, because of the attitude of "Lord Whitewash". The impression left was that the murder of Nationalists always merited an inquiry whereas the murder of a Unionist never did. In any case the Prime Minister had opened a can of worms by agreeing to a new Bloody Sunday inquiry.

The Talks Process

Robinson said that he was very worried about the Government's position on participation in the talks. Dr. Mowlam had made a grave error by going into the Maze Prison when she was already aware of UFF involvement in the Loyalist killings. It was irrelevant whether she had not known "conclusively" until later. And if she was aware conclusively by 12 January that the UFF were involved, why had she not then taken action to expel the UDP from the talks rather than waiting for the Chief Constable to say something. There also seemed to be efforts to cover up forensic evidence. He had asked in the House on 14 January about guns used in Loyalist killings, and had received only an evasive answer. There was also evidence that the Banbridge bomb had been planted by the IRA – for example the IRA had admitted it in phone calls. There was also forensic evidence. Similarly, the DAAD, an IRA flag of convenience, had admitted to the killing in the Meadows Tavern. Meanwhile all the paramilitary organisations were involved in the increasing tide of paramilitary punishment attacks. All this was in flagrant contradiction with the Mitchell Principles, but the Government preferred to close its eyes. The DUP had left the process because those coming into it were clearly not committed to peaceful means. The DUP was still out, while those left in were pursuing violence with impunity.

The Prime Minister said that he accepted this was a difficult situation. The paramilitaries were undoubtedly guilty of some unacceptable activity. However, the UDP had been expelled from the talks. He was still committed to trying to move the talks along successfully.

Robinson said that the RUC Chief Constable had plainly said that PIRA were active. Dodds said that even the UVF were plainly involved in the shooting of one of the taxi drivers. One of the murderers was even a member of the PUP

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delegation, as everyone on the Shankhill Road knew. Paisley added that the ordinary people of Northern Ireland knew what was going on and were not fooled. The DUP had realised that the talks process was a farce after they had brought the first indictment against the UVF and found that their chief defender was Paddy Mayhew. John Major had told them that the first thing on the talks agenda would be decommissioning, and that arms would have to be given up every month. Where was that promise now? The paramilitaries were also heavily involved in racketeering and drugs. The whole political process had been corrupted by their presence and the Government's constant pandering to the paramilitaries, in order to keep them in. The talks process could never give Adams what he wanted. He would pocket what he could and then go back to violence. It was revealing that Government officials were already talking to the UDP about getting them back into the process. This would rebound on the Government in the IRA context. The Government should stick by the Mitchell Principles.

Robinson said that, at a theoretical level, he could see the case for weaning the paramilitaries away from violence. But there had to be benchmarks for the process. These benchmarks were the Mitchell Principles. In practice, the democrats were being dragged down to the level of the terrorists rather than the terrorists becoming democrats. The Government was looking ridiculous as it tried to keep the IRA in, for example the recent paper recommitting the Government to the Framework Document.

The Prime Minister said that the Heads of Agreement paper was the basis for discussion. In any case there was no point in this argument. He accepted a lot of what the DUP had been saying until that point, but they should be interested in the content of a potential agreement not where it stood in relation to the Framework Document. He could see no problems himself with a solution involving devolved institutions for Northern Ireland, cross-border institutions based on agreement and within the mandate of a Northern Ireland Assembly, and East West institutions. Obviously the North South structures were the most difficult but the need was to get down to negotiation on how they might work.

Paisley said that North South bodies could not work as suggested by the Prime Minister, since effectively half of the Northern Ireland delegation would be on the Irish Government side. Any such bodies would eventually over-rule the Northern Ireland Assembly. The people of Northern Ireland had not agreed to this.

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The Prime Minister said that this was the point of a referendum. He was quite convinced that a settlement on the lines proposed would be more difficult for Nationalists in the end. If an acceptable agreement could be achieved and approved in a referendum, this was the best basis to take on anyone who wanted to continue violence. It would knock away all the props of Republican propaganda.

Paisley said that the Nationalists would not agree to a Northern Ireland Assembly. Robinson commented that the only reason they would agree to it was as a mechanism to get the North South bodies. The Prime Minister said that there was no reason to believe that a Northern Ireland Assembly would not be a real body. In any case this was what the negotiations were about.

Paisley went on to a different tack. The real problem was that the SDLP was increasingly weak, and the Sinn Fein vote was going up, as recent local election results graphically demonstrated. Historically, extremists always replaced moderates in republicanism. It was happening again, with Sinn Fein replacing the SDLP. Sinn Fein were jockeying for position by rejecting the Heads of Agreement document. They had also been made respectable by the present Government. His bottom line was that there was no way Unionists would accept any agreement where the South could interfere in Northern Ireland from outside. Co-operation with the South was fine, but Northern Ireland had to remain firmly within the UK.

Robinson said that he agreed with the Prime Minister that the need was to look at the substance of an agreement not hark back to the Framework Document. The Framework Document problem was in its overall stance, not so much what it actually said. But North South bodies must not have any executive powers at all. There should be no implementing bodies. Those attending North South bodies on either side should go back to their respective jurisdictions to take action. There must not be any embryo government of Ireland. Meanwhile, the need was to get the Provisionals out of the process.

The meeting ended with another warning from Paisley that the SDLPs days were numbered, as Mallon plainly saw.

Comment

The Prime Minister found the DUP's arguments about paramilitary violence difficult to refute. Clearly it is difficult to call for any group's expulsion

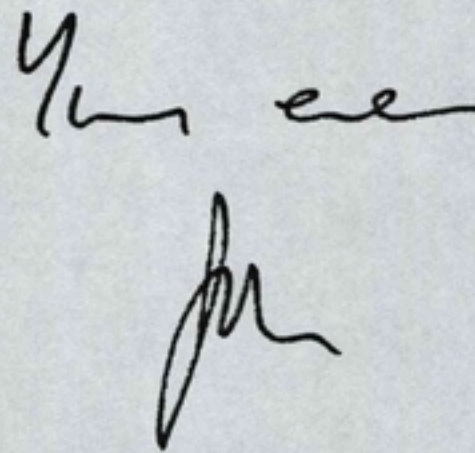
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on the basis of small amounts of unclaimed activity, but the Prime Minister believes we are in danger of seeming too soft and hypocritical. We should therefore take a harder line in public about continuation of these unacceptable activities, which do indeed conflict with the Mitchell Principles. We could presumably also raise the question in the talks, to issue a warning and demonstrate that we have at least noticed, and that there are clear limits. It would be helpful to have your rapid advice on this.

I am copying this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'John Holmes', with a stylized 'J' and 'H'.

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.
Northern Ireland Office

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