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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

cc: JH  
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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
WHITEHALL  
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

John Holmes Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON

27 November 1996

Dear John

**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH DR PAISLEY, 28 NOVEMBER**

The Prime Minister will be meeting Dr Paisley on Thursday at 4.15. You sent us with your letter of 25 November one from Dr Paisley of that date about Sinn Fein entry to the Talks, which will presumably be the main business of the meeting. Dr Paisley will be accompanied by Rev William McCrea and Peter Robinson. The Secretary of State and Michael Ancram will attend the meeting from here.

Objectives

Dr Paisley's objective in seeking a meeting now may have much to do with the fact that his Party Conference is meeting this weekend, and a media splash on Friday in which he was depicted laying down the line to the Prime Minister would get matters off to a good start. It may be that some traditional Paisley theatre can be expected, therefore. Our objectives for the meeting are limited. They are to give Dr Paisley a chance to express himself and reassure him as best we can over Hume/Adams. It may be improbable that anything the Prime Minister says will persuade Dr Paisley to lead his party into more constructive courses in the Talks.

Background the DUP in the talks

The DUP, operating more or less in tandem with Mr McCartney, have maintained a hard line throughout the Talks, beginning with a walk-out over the "imposition" of the Chairmen, followed by opposition to the Rules of Procedure before the summer, and to the agreement of the agenda for the rest of the opening plenary in October. In those cases, the UUP eventually arrived at a compromise, permitting progress to be made. The DUP now maintains an intransigent position over decommissioning, where it has always insisted (rejecting the Mitchell compromise) on prior decommissioning. The DUP and Mr McCartney have to some extent led the debate within Unionist circles on this, and have been instrumental in leading the UUP into a harder line. Dr Paisley opposed in characteristically colourful terms - 'surrender, lying, cowardice, cheating' - the suggested conclusions of the two Governments on decommissioning, published on 1 October; he has not been involved in discussion on the more recent compromise we have developed (my letter of 14 November). The two parties have also sought the exclusion of loyalist parties (there is bad blood between the DUP and the paramilitaries, and electoral considerations are important).

Beneath the surface, the position is slightly more complicated. There have been a number of threats of DUP walkouts that have not materialised. When they left over the arrival of Chairmen, they soon returned, under protest, and little more has been heard of their reservations. Dr Paisley at times prides himself on his history of being involved in negotiations (sometimes when the UUP were away). And some members of DUP, notably Mr Robinson, are anxious for that the Talks should make early progress.

The meeting: Dr Paisley's letter

Dr Paisley's line that his party would not remain in talks if Sinn Fein were there without prior decommissioning and a permanent and credible repudiation of violence is an established one - if anything it might be seen as a slight softening of his line, which has often been simply "we will not talk to Sinn Fein".

Dr Paisley speaks of his fears that the Government intends to "bow the knee to Mark II of the Adams/Hume plan". This was of course written before Mr Adams and Mr Hume expressed their disappointment with the Government's response, which may blunt his thrust. One possible ground of DUP irritation, real or contrived, may be prior notice of Hume/Adams given to Mr Trimble: such privileged access for the UUP has angered the DUP before. Mr Trimble has acknowledged in the media some prior knowledge of the exchanges. The fact is, however that Dr Paisley has not sought to engage with Ministers over this. The Government will by the time of the meeting have published the re-statement of policy, so the Prime Minister will be able to speak on the basis of it. Lines to take are provided.

Dr Paisley says that if the Prime Minister "bows the knee" to Sinn Fein, the DUP will seek to bring down the Government. The party has not in fact been conspicuous in its support of the Government. In the 1995/96 session, Dr Paisley voted with the Government in 8 divisions, and against on 28. Dr McCrea voted with in 12 divisions, and against in 22. Mr Robinson voted with in 9 divisions, and against in 21.

It is unlikely that Dr Paisley will be deflected from his position, in the Talks on decommissioning this side of an election, or

Sinn Fein's exclusion; but I also attach some lines that may be drawn on in discussion of the Talks.

Yours sincerely  
David V. L.  
f W K LINDSAY



## PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH DR PAISLEY - 28 NOVEMBER

Lines to Take

Congratulations on the 25th anniversary of your party, which I understand you celebrated on 30 October.

Hume/Adams

- We received approaches asking us to make clear what is necessary for Sinn Fein to participate in talks; we have said we would be prepared to reiterate our position on a number of key points with a view to avoiding all misunderstanding. [The text has now been published].
- We have set out established policy that has been known and in the public domain for some time. We are not in the business of changing policy to buy a ceasefire.
- There have been no secret deals, no negotiations over a ceasefire, and no meetings with Sinn Fein.
- Our position on Sinn Fein entry to talks remains the same: Sinn Fein may only enter after an unequivocal IRA ceasefire. There is no change in policy, which is set out in legislation.
- If a ceasefire were declared, we would need to take great care to assess whether it was unequivocal. In making this assessment, account would have to be taken of all circumstances, including events on the ground.
- We know and respect your views on talking to Sinn Fein; but we have, unapologetically, always sought an inclusive process to maximise the chances of a widely accepted political accommodation.

- But in the light of violent events since 9 February - Canary Wharf, Manchester, Osnabruck, Thiepval - we do of course need reassurance that Sinn Fein genuinely wishes to move into peaceful and democratic politics.
- [Defensive: where next on Hume/Adams?] We shall always be interested to hear what Mr Hume has to say. But our position on talks and a settlement are clear and on the record and not open to negotiation with Sinn Fein, or the IRA. Ministers have not had meetings with Sinn Fein since the end of the ceasefire, and we do not expect to have any.
- [Defensive: what notice has Mr Trimble had?] We have had discussions with Mr Trimble at which the subject has arisen, and we have discussed it with him. [If pressed: we maintain confidences about the detail of exchanges. You have not sought to engage with us on this].

#### Talks/Decommissioning

- We shall press on with talks whether Sinn Fein are there or not. We believe they offer the best hope for a generation of a comprehensive, widely-acceptable settlement that could underpin lasting peace.
- I know very strong views are held on all sides. We seek arrangements for decommissioning that stand a realistic chance of delivering it. The Mitchell compromise of some decommissioning during talks, we believe, meets that test.
- We shall put forward legislation to permit decommissioning in the very near future. The Irish intend to do the same.

■ Amnesties: we have accepted the recommendations of the International Body that those involved in decommissioning should not be prosecuted for possession of armaments while acting in accordance with a decommissioning scheme. That again is a matter of realism: we want people to hand arms over. There will be no general amnesties for terrorist-related offences.