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From: John Holmes
Date: 5 November 1996

PRIME MINISTER

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

File
John
H. K.

As you know, the immediate Irish reaction to the text I sent them this morning was negative. Whatever its merits, it would not lead to a ceasefire but would instead provoke recriminations and lead to the collapse of the initiative, with the danger of Hume and Sinn Fein putting the blame on us. The problem was the familiar one: the suggestion that Sinn Fein would only enter talks after a qualifying period simply would not run.

I took Teahon through the merits and reasonableness of what we were proposing, and repeated the pointlessness of letting Sinn Fein into the talks if all the Unionists simply walked out. But the discussion was a stand-off.

The Irish have now come back late this evening with their own revised version of the text. I attach a self-explanatory letter from me to the NIO covering this new text. As you will see, the essential point is that they (and Hume) think they can deliver from the IRA/Sinn Fein the wording on "permanence" you suggested to Hume, and will go all out for this if we indicate readiness to use something like their text if they succeed (otherwise they have no leverage over the IRA/Sinn Fein).

I attach our version of the text for comparison.

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2/11 Predictably, this Irish response puts us in one of our usual acute dilemmas. Language on the lines proposed from the IRA/Sinn Fein would indeed be a worthwhile prize and could change the nature of the game. And it is good to have Irish backing for the rest of our text. But we have a firm position agreed by NI. And if we go at all far in the Irish direction, we could be seen as naive in letting Sinn Fein into the talks, even on the very conditional basis proposed by the Irish. We would certainly need to work hard on Trimble and Taylor, and of course go back to NI before we took things very far. Meanwhile, there are time pressures all round.

Trimble has incidentally been on the phone to me today, and has spoken to Lord Cranborne. He was satisfied with what you told him last week, but is anxious to get the terms of a ceasefire into the public domain and get on with the talks. He wants movement this week if at all possible. He was apparently very positive to Lord Cranborne about continued support of the Government in general. I also took him through the arguments about extension of the Decommissioning Bill and suggested he speak to the Home Secretary so that he could understand the real difficulties there were - which he has since done, on a very amicable basis.

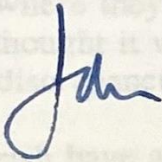
Paddy and Spring are having breakfast tomorrow at 0815 in Belfast, and will obviously be discussing our text and the Irish proposal. Do you want to give Paddy a steer in any direction in advance (he has not yet seen the Irish text himself but will do so first thing tomorrow morning) or are you content to let him discuss on a non-committal, entirely ad referendum basis, and report to you afterwards?

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My instinct is that, however tempting, we cannot simply turn the Irish down flat; that we may just be able to negotiate a reasonable half-way house with them on our text, for use if IRA/Sinn Fein come up with the real goods; and that we may need to signal enough readiness to be flexible about this (in an unspecific way), depending on what the Irish bring back, to persuade the Irish and Hume to try their luck again with the IRA. We could also perhaps throw into the mix the continued desirability of Sinn Fein being ready to say something positive about the Mitchell Report's recommendations on decommissioning, and about the consent principle.

Could we have an early word tomorrow morning around 0745 so that I can give Paddy Mayhew any steer you want?



JOHN HOLMES

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