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SUBJECT *File*
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Filed on:

From the Private Secretary

28 November 1996

Dear Gen,

CALL BY THE DUP, 28 NOVEMBER

Dr. Paisley, Peter Robinson and Willie McCrea called on the Prime Minister for 50 minutes this afternoon. Sir Patrick Mayhew and Michael Ancram were also present.

Dr. Paisley asked whether the Prime Minister had received his letter. The Prime Minister said that he had. He had noted that it was as crisply worded as usual. There was no mistaking its meaning.

Discussion then shifted to the announcement the Prime Minister had made in the House of Commons earlier, and the texts which had been published. Robinson commented that we had not published Hume's communication to the Government. The Prime Minister said that he did not think it would be right for him to do so, although he had no objection if Hume wanted to publish it. The Prime Minister went on to describe the thinking behind what we had said. The basic point was that a fake ceasefire like the last one would not do. A new ceasefire would have to be genuinely unequivocal, with more convincing words than last time about its lasting nature. But we would also need actions as well as words, for example an end to paramilitary activity. We had set out criteria by which this could be measured, and made clear that we would need some time to assess whether these criteria were being met. We did not have a particular time period in mind, since if we set one, that would lead to the expectation that Sinn Fein would automatically come in once it was over.

The Prime Minister continued that we were not convinced that a genuine ceasefire was likely, although another short term ceasefire was possible. That was why we had wanted to set our position out clearly in advance. If we had gone on waiting to publish our position, Sinn Fein would have continued leveraging themselves into a better PR position. We had been aware of Unionist suspicion of our intentions, and determined to dispel this. If there was a ceasefire, Sinn Fein would have to meet the criteria. If they did not, they

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would not be admitted to the talks. If they went in but then failed to live up to their promises, they would have to leave.

Dr. Paisley said that, comparing our text with Sinn Fein statements, he believed there had been movement by the British Government towards the Sinn Fein position. He did not like the reference to the two Governments meeting Sinn Fein to hear their commitment to the Mitchell principles. Bypassing the other parties in this way was exactly what Adams wanted. Robinson asked whether this step would follow immediately after a ceasefire. The Prime Minister said that the Governments would only meet Sinn Fein to hear their explanations, not to negotiate. We had not put a timescale on when such a meeting would take place. That could only be decided once there was a ceasefire. In any case, Ministerial meetings would be preceded by meetings at official level.

Dr. Paisley referred to the confidence building measures mentioned on page three of the statement. The Prime Minister said that it was clear from the text that these were for Sinn Fein to take, not the Government.

Dr. Paisley said that he objected to the suggestion that the two Governments would be in control of the process following a ceasefire, for example the proposal for a plenary. This seemed to take no account of the views of the other parties. Sir Patrick Mayhew said that it was for him, and him alone, to decide whether Sinn Fein could be given an invitation to join the talks. He had to be satisfied that they qualified in terms of paragraphs 8 and 9 of the command paper. Whether a plenary followed an invitation to Sinn Fein to join the talks would of course depend on all the parties.

Robinson commented that we had been through all this before. The Security Forces had failed to understand what the IRA were up to during the previous ceasefire, and the IRA would be more careful to conceal their traces this time round. Something more tangible was needed before Sinn Fein could join the talks - either a very long period of time or the handing over of some weapons. The Prime Minister commented that he believed we now had better intelligence than in the past. We would certainly know what was going on, as would others living in Northern Ireland. We had no intention of being taken in.

Dr. Paisley said that targeting was going on even now. He claimed that the Conservative MP Rod Richards had observed one of his colleagues being followed and targeted only the day before. He recalled what the Prime Minister had said during the last ceasefire. He had claimed that if it broke down, the whole world would put Sinn Fein in the dock. This had not happened in practice. Meanwhile, he also did not like the suggestion in our text that there should be negotiations in good faith on constitutional issues. He for one would

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not negotiate on these issues.

The Prime Minister commented that the Unionists enjoyed every possible safeguard. There was no chance of the Union being fractured. Dr. Paisley said that he had been given the same reassurance by a succession of Prime Ministers. But he had also seen a succession of unacceptable documents, from the Anglo Irish Agreement to the Framework Document. "His country" was being run by Dublin, the Alliance party and a motley collection of other small parties, who formed a caucus in the talks. The Unionists were a minority in the talks and were not taken seriously. He knew in any case that once Sinn Fein joined the talks, it would be impossible to get them out again. All these things were leading to Unionist unrest.

Robinson shifted on to continuing Loyalist violence, referring to recent shooting and other incidents. The Loyalists remained in the talks despite their violence, and the clear threats to Billy Wright. And on top of that, the Prime Minister received them and praised them as heroes of the peace movement. In fact, they were gangsters.

The Prime Minister said that he was not aware of the details of Loyalist violence. But the point of meeting them and referring to them approvingly was to try to stop them going back to violence. This led to a good deal more from the DUP side about the nature of the Loyalists and their connections with the CLMC, coupled with resentment at praise for the Loyalist role in the talks.

Dr. Paisley returned to how the British Government had moved towards the Sinn Fein position, and the likelihood of further movement. Hume and the Irish had already been saying that our position was only a holding position and would shift further. Robinson again commented on the way in which we had picked up Sinn Fein wording, for example about no pre-conditions, and had moved towards them on the idea of a timeframe. The Prime Minister said that we had not changed our view on a timeframe. It was clear that decisions on this were in the hands of the talks participants.

Dr. Paisley commented that the talks were a farce, and the IRA had no intention of giving up violence. Nevertheless, the Government were telling Sinn Fein that if they signed up to the Mitchell principles, they could come in to the talks. Anyone could sign up to these principles without meaning it for a second. Adams certainly would. The Prime Minister said that he understood these points. But we would be able to monitor the performance of those who signed up to the principles and throw them out of the talks if they broke them. This provoked another series of complaints from the DUP side about the failure to throw out the Loyalists from the talks. McCrea repeated that the Loyalists were just a bunch of thugs. Robinson said that the UDA man who had been on his way to kill Alec Kerr had not even been arrested although he had confessed

his mission. Sir Patrick Mayhew said that he rejected any suggestion of political interference in such decisions. Complaints should be addressed to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Robinson returned to the document which Hume had given us. Why could it not be published? The Prime Minister repeated that this was for Hume, and he would not be surprised if Hume did publish it.

Dr. Paisley attempted to conclude that nothing which had been said changed what he had said in his letter to the Prime Minister. He was gravely worried about what was happening in the talks, particularly about the influence of Mitchell. Mitchell's staff were socialising with Sinn Fein, but nothing had been done about it. Sir Patrick Mayhew said that he had no reason to doubt the assurances he had been given by Senator Mitchell on this score.

The Prime Minister said that he did not think either Dublin or Washington would react well to our publication of the document. But we had wanted to make clear the criteria which the IRA and Sinn Fein would have to meet. This was now out publicly, so everyone knew what the criteria were.

McCrea said that if there was no more movement towards Sinn Fein, if the Government showed that it was totally committed to Ulster, and there were no more bad documents, this might be reassuring. But the proof of the pudding would be in the eating. The meeting concluded on this ambiguous note.

Comment

The meeting was friendlier in tone than this account might suggest. There was a general theme of suspicion of the Government from the DUP side, but they did not seem to have a clear focus in what they were saying. They preferred instead to raise a series of individual complaints and anecdotes, in a now familiar way.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever
John

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