

SECRET AND PERSONAL
From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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Sir Charles Powell KCMG
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PUS/754
02 JAN 1991
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Ps/Sps(B)
Ps(L&B)
Mr Pilling
Mr Alston
December 1990
Mr Derrell
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill
Mr Petch

Dear Charles

21st
PS - M Keoh

Thank you for your letter of 3 December enclosing one to the Prime Minister from Gerry Adams, the Sinn Fein MP for West Belfast.

PA BY Movement 23699A

There is little new here in terms of content. Adams is simply repeating the Sinn Fein line that HMG should set a definite date for withdrawal from NI and act as midwife and financial guarantor to a new, united Ireland. This policy of course ignores the wishes of the unionist majority in Northern Ireland (who, Adams says, would have to be persuaded to see the benefits of throwing in their lot with a united Ireland). It also ignores the existence and legitimacy of the government of the Republic of Ireland. The Provisionals' terrorist campaign - an explicit and avowed part of their strategy for achieving their aims - is glossed over with the implication that it is within HMG's power to bring it to an end by acceding to Sinn Fein's political demands, or at least entering into "meaningful discussions" with them. And nowhere does Adams say that the extreme republicanism espoused by the Provisionals attracts only 5% of first preference votes within the island of Ireland (1989 European election figures).

What is nonetheless interesting is the timing and almost cordial tone of the letter. It appears to be part of the Provisionals' response to the speech which my Secretary of State made on 9 November and which made clear not only that HMG had no selfish strategic interest in Northern Ireland, but also that an Irish republicanism seen to have finally renounced violence would be able to seek a role in the peaceful political life of Northern

SECRET AND PERSONAL

SECRET AND PERSONAL

Ireland. These words, as was intended, have struck a chord in some Provisional quarters. Sinn Fein spokesmen have gone out of their way in recent weeks to restate their political aims and to hint that an end to what they term the "armed struggle" may be in sight if HMG, and the constitutional and political parties in Northern Ireland, can meet them half-way. It also seems clear that Sinn Fein are interested in building links with other nationalist groups, possibly believing that they stand more chance of advancing their aims as part of a wider approach. It may be that some realise that this cannot happen without an end to violence and are looking for a way to enter the political process.

I might add that these observations are supported by indications from covert sources, and indeed we believe that there may be at least some within the Provisional movement (including Adams himself) who are making determined efforts to establish contact with us and with the other political parties in Northern Ireland. However, the extent of the influence that the more politically inclined members have on the military wing of the PIRA is unclear. We shall be letting the Prime Minister have a fuller report on all this as soon as we have had the opportunity fully to assess these developments.

As for the time being the terrorism continues, and there is no hard evidence of a real wish on the part of the Provisionals as a whole for rational discussion free from the threat of violence, we therefore recommend a short, curt response. A suitable draft is attached.

Yours aw,

Tony

A J D PAWSON

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