



PRIME MINISTER

CC: PS/PUS (L) - 1 of 3
 4 / MR PILLING - 2 of 3
 2 / MR DEVERELL - 3 of 3-M

POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS

I recognise that you have several pressing pre-occupations at present, but you should be aware that there are signs that significant elements within the Provisional Movement (PIRA/Sinn Fein) are giving serious consideration to adopting an alternative to violence. These signs are still uncertain and no immediate decisions are necessary. But the benefits of a possible long-term switch to political methods are so significant that we should consider carefully our response.

2. The signals from the Provisional movement include their public expression of serious interest in my 'British presence' speech of 9 November (to which Gerry Adams drew up a lengthy response which he sent to me); he has sent reasoned letters recently both to you and to me; and the Provisionals sent private word that their Christmas ceasefire was intended to be seen as a signal.

3. Since 1981 the Provisional movement has been prepared to take an active role in political life (though of course Adams has not taken his seat at Westminster). There is at present no burning grievance such as the prison protests of the late 70's and early 80's around which they can mobilise support including support for violent action. There does appear to be a developing awareness in the Provisional movement that they cannot make progress with their long term political aims while violence continues, and that it is in fact an obstacle to the advancement of their aims. It is possible to see this as a further stage in the slow evolution

of the Provisional movement towards normal political life, from its emergence in 1969-70 out of the Official IRA/Sinn Fein with its two wings - PIRA as the covert terrorist side of the movement and the Provisional Sinn Fein as the overt political organisation though both inextricably intertwined and with the military side in ultimate control.

4. Our response to terrorism has included a number of measures to address the more grotesque aspects of their 'dual strategy'. In 1988 Douglas Hurd, when Home Secretary, introduced broadcasting restrictions which bit on Sinn Fein spokesmen as well as on PIRA as a proscribed organisation; and the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 requires all candidates in district council and Assembly elections to sign a declaration on non-violence. We have at the same time emphasised the availability of the democratic route to those ready to take it. Our stance on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland is particularly relevant. We have made it clear that Northern Ireland will remain a part of the UK unless and until a majority of people there want to leave it. But equally important we have, particularly since the Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985, made a formal commitment to facilitate the establishment of a united Ireland if and when a majority of people in Northern Ireland wish it. This pledge, in Article 1(c) of the Agreement, establishes what is sometimes termed British 'Neutrality' on the future of Northern Ireland. I have made it clear in public, as Tom King as Northern Ireland Secretary also did, that, whatever may have been the historical position, we have no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland.

7. There has, particularly since the Provisionals' brief

5. Against this background, a number of people of goodwill outside Government have also tried to convince the Provisional movement that their terrorist campaign is counter-productive, in that the only way their objective could conceivably be attained would be through persuasion. These efforts have most effect when undertaken from within the nationalist community, and Archbishop Cahal Daly has been a forceful spokesman on this theme. John Hume has been active over many years, both in articulating in the strongest possible terms his condemnation for the terrorist campaign and in arguing that constitutional political methods offer the only possible route to achieve their ends. In 1988, and this became publicly known at the time, he held a series of discussions with Adams attempting to persuade him of this. John Hume has in fact maintained this dialogue and has kept me informed of it on a strictly private and confidential basis. He now believes that the Provisional movement is close to renouncing violence, but that those within it who argue for this course of action need to be able to point to some tangible gain. Specifically, he has recently put it to me, and to Mr Haughey, that a ceasefire could be secured if the British and Irish governments were to make a joint public declaration that long term stability in Ireland would be enhanced if the peoples there could be persuaded to unite within the European Community.

6. John Hume is one of a small number of 'messengers', claiming to speak with a degree of knowledge and authority, who have put forward similar propositions recently. By one such account, a private meeting between Government officials and representatives of the Provisional movement was said to be enough to secure a ceasefire.

7. There has, particularly since the Provisionals' brief ceasefire at Christmas, been press speculation which has prompted some questions, including those which Mr Trimble has put to you; and a recent Sunday Telegraph article (27.1.91) by Alan Murray said, "It is suspected that channels of communication through the SDLP leadership have been established between the Northern Ireland Office and Sinn Fein". Publicly and privately we have maintained the line that there can be no question of HMG dealing with PIRA while it is engaged in violence, but that following a renunciation of the terrorist campaign we would respond imaginatively. Privately, I have been anxious not to close the door to the messengers. I have gone further than this only to the extent that I or my officials have ensured that they are aware of public statements which I have made, and I have made clear my interest in anything they have to say. I have emphasised however that there is no question of our negotiating while the terrorists' campaign persists, and I have given no authority for any private message to be conveyed on my behalf.

8. My aim has been, and remains, to keep open channels, to appear potentially responsive, and to ensure that we miss no opportunity to capitalise on any genuine shift in the Provisional movement; but to do so without compromising our firm policy, and public position, that we will not deal with, or reward, those who use violence for political ends.

9. I have of course been particularly anxious to listen carefully to what John Hume has to say to me. There are several reasons for this. He is, in his own right, by far the most important and authoritative of the messengers. He is also known to be in touch with Adams, a serious figure in the

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Provisional movement. He is also in touch with the Taoiseach personally on these issues, though he has asked that we do not disclose this to the Irish. I have had a brief private discussion with Mr Haughey though I believe that within the Irish government machine only a limited circle, perhaps not even including the Foreign Minister Mr Collins, know that our discussion touched on these matters. I am very conscious that Mr Hume, like Mr Haughey, is not a wholly disinterested intermediary but has his own political agenda and aspirations, though I do not doubt that he is wholly sincere in his wish to see violence ended. Both Mr Hume and the Irish government have periodically advanced the argument that I should not press too forcefully our efforts in pursuit of formal political and constitutional talks, in case that jeopardises what they see as the more important issue, namely a prospective PIRA ceasefire. The true position, in my judgement, is that our revived political development efforts over the last 12 months or so should be continued, not least because they constitute an important pressure on the Provisional movement to rethink its stance on violence.

10. No immediate decisions are called for. But I suggest our future actions should be guided by these considerations. We look for a permanent rejection of violence. A temporary ceasefire may have little to offer us even though Republican mythology is that earlier ceasefires damaged them. A long term renunciation of the use of violence in pursuit of political objectives would be a major prize, and no reasonable opportunity of securing it should be missed, while recognising the complication that, for internal reasons of republican theology, the Provisionals would be likely to present any ceasefire as tactical and terminable. It would be surprising if they ever formally renounced what they would describe as the right of Irishmen to take arms against

30 JANUARY 1991

S E C R E T A N D P E R S O N A L

CONFIDENTIAL

2

oppression. Moreover, it is very much an open question whether, other things being equal, the leadership of the Provisionals would actually be able to deliver a cessation of violence of a prolonged and general character.

11. My immediate objective will be to maintain in public the full range of our policy positions, including our condemnation of terrorism, and to keep open private channels by listening and by repeating only what has been said publicly. I shall also attempt to maintain our efforts at overt political progress, in dialogue with the Irish Government and the constitutional political parties.

12. However we could be approaching the point where more may be needed if a ceasefire is to be kept in play. It may be that Mr Haughey will outline some proposition to me tomorrow when I call on him while I am in Dublin for the next Intergovernmental Conference. If we are to exploit, in the national interest, any tentative moves towards peace by the Provisionals, we may need to respond flexibly and accept some risks, provided we can do so without compromising any important interest or principle.

13. I am copying this minute only to Sir Robin Butler, but I will gladly give it a wider circulation, say to Douglas Hurd, Kenneth Baker and Tom King, if you wished to widen the immediate discussion.

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30 JANUARY 1991

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