

The Rt Hon Paddy Ashdown MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
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Date :- 3 November 1980

Dear Prime Minister,

I returned from a short visit to Belfast, yesterday.

I know Belfast quite well, having been brought up just outside the city and having served in it in the early 1970s. I must tell you that I have never known the city and its people so fearful. There is an almost tangible sense of foreboding in the areas I visited.

What is more worrying, is the feeling amongst many on both sides of the sectarian divide that hope is dying.

I fully understand why it was necessary for you and the Irish Prime Minister not to pursue the Hume/Adams proposals. But this has left an even greater weight of responsibility on the two Governments to act urgently in order to fill the vacuum which remains. The vacuum which was allowed to exist after the end of the cross Party talks a year ago, created the space into which the men of violence were, once again, able to move. It is imperative that no such hiatus is allowed to develop at present.

Paradoxically, the recent tragedies have also created a new realisation even in some surprising quarters, that violence is not the answer. As one knowledgeable and respected commentator put it to me yesterday "there are more people in Northern Ireland now ready to deal than I can ever remember before".

What the people of Northern Ireland are desperately looking for is strong, clear lead. I do not believe that this is now likely to come from within the Northern Ireland constitutional parties represented at Westminster. I believe that you and the Irish Prime Minister are now the only people able to provide this. Many hope that the joint statement issued after your meeting with the Irish Prime Minister, together with your welcome decision to meet all four constitutional leaders this week is an indication that you recognise the urgency and danger inherent in the present situation and have decided to take personal charge of it and to invest the search for a new avenue towards peace with your own authority. I very much hope that this is your view.

If it is, then you and the Irish Prime Minister are entitled to the support of all who represent Northern Ireland and wish it well, inside both parliaments and outside them.

If hope is allowed to die again in Northern Ireland, the consequences could be very grave indeed. I urge you to waste no time in making it clear to all that the momentum established by your joint initiative with the Irish Prime Minister is going to be maintained.

Yours

Paddy

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FOR THE ATTENTION OF: The Alliance Party

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MESSAGE:

For your information