

J.M.J.A.



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6.9.87

Dear Mr.King,

Mr.John Hume has told you that,for the past year or so,I have been working with him,privately and confidentially,to open the way to a just and lasting peace for every interest and every party concerned in the present conflict in Northern Ireland.In particular,I have been involved with him in a continual and combined effort to persuade the I.R.A.to end their present campaign.I am aware, therefore,of the conversations he has had with you and the Northern Ireland Office about this matter and of the way these conversations have been developing.

This letter should be read in the context of these developments and,I trust,as part of them because my purpose in writing it is to support what Mr.Hume has been saying and to give my own understanding of the opportunity for peace with the I.R.A. which,I am certain,is available to us at the present time.I am convinced, indeed,that we are now at a critical cross-roads as far as taking the gun,forever, out of Irish politics is concerned.

To set the points that I shall make in this letter in context,I would like,first,to explain that my interest in this whole enterprise is not political but pastoral and moral.I know that a priest,like the Church herself,cannot get involved in party or nationalist politics nor can he take sides in matters of political opinion and judgement.At the same time,however,I believe that a priest,again like the Church herself,must respond to the human and moral dimensions of a political situation,especially in so far as it involves people,whoever they may be,in suffering and tragedy.

It is this tragice dimension of the situation in Northern Ireland that concerns me in my work with Mr.Hume. Whatever my private opinions may be,I am not, as a priest,either for or against any particular,political form of solution to the conflict,no matter what it might be,provided it is just and acceptable to the people as a whole.

My only aim is to help those people who,if the present situation continues, will be killed,injured or imprisoned over the next few weeks and months and whose personal tragedies will blight,not only their own lives,but also the lives of those to whom they are near and dear.

I can bring this explanation of my interest into sharper focus by saying that it was the death of a U.D.R. soldier in South Armagh about four years ago that sparked off the efforts I have been making since then to end,once and for all, the violent situation which is causing such tragedies.

I have been involved in the processes of peace-making since the troubles began in 1969,sometimes at the level of political and Church leadership,sometimes

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in the prisons, sometimes across the political divide between Unionists and Nationalists but most often at the level of the streets in Nationalist areas. Because of illness, I gave up this kind of involvement for a number of years and it was only when the U.D.R. man I mentioned was killed and I felt that the Church and priests like myself could and should be playing a more active and effective role in ending these kind of tragedies that I became involved again.

My role, therefore, as I see it, is to represent and to do all I can today to save, the next person who may be killed or maimed, whoever he or she may be, and the next family that may be shattered, wherever that family may live, because of the continuing conflict in Northern Ireland.

I would also like to explain my position regarding secrecy and confidentiality. As a priest of the Redemptorist Order, I am not subject or answerable to any of the Irish bishops in the work I do for peace. I am answerable only to one other priest, the superior of the Irish Province of the Redemptorists, who, at the present time, is Father Raphael Gallagher C.Ss.R. But even here, I am answerable only in a general way, in the sense that I must work under his jurisdiction. What I do from day to day, where I go or whom I see, are matters for my own discretion and need not be known by anyone else. This means that, as far as any Church authority, either religious or diocesan, is concerned, I am free to keep any confidences or any secrets regarding my work within whatever limits I decide or within whatever limits I am asked to keep them or, because of their nature, they need to be kept.

I shall comment, first, on the latest message you gave to Mr. Hume because it seriously questions the sincerity of the people with whom we are dealing and the success of this whole enterprise depends, as you know, on the sincerity of everyone concerned.

For reasons which I shall give below, I am certain that the influential people (only a few) on the Republican side who are dealing with this matter are taking it very seriously and that they are, and will continue to be, sincere and honourable in their approach to it. I am also certain that there is no intention on their part to embarrass or, much less, to deceive you or the Northern Ireland Office in this matter or to seek to gain some short-term benefit from it for themselves. On the contrary, I know they regard this opportunity for peace as a critical one and believe it would be a very grave tragedy if it were to be lost either through a misunderstanding of their attitudes or a mis-handling of the opportunity itself.

This assessment of their sincerity is based on long experience and also on direct and personal knowledge of their constant attitude to what has been happening, through Mr. Hume, over the past year.

By 'long experience', I mean an experience that goes back, in general, to the beginning of 'the troubles' in 1969 and, in particular, to the time in 1975 when the last I.R.A. truce finally broke down. Apart from a period of illness, I have, during that time, been continually involved in activities related to peace-making. As a result, I have formed close personal friendships with many people on both sides of the political divide in Northern Ireland, and not least with people of the Republican Movement (to use their own description of themselves). I have, therefore, a long and personal knowledge of the people on the Republican side who are

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are co-operating with me at the present time, a knowledge that goes back through the years but especially to the time, four years ago, when, at my invitation and on my initiative, they first became involved in the present enterprise.

I can, therefore, say that I know the people with whom I am dealing long enough and closely enough to be certain, beyond any shadow of doubt, that they are not deceiving or using me or Mr. Hume nor are they being used or deceived themselves in relation to what we are all trying to do for peace. For the same reason, I am also certain that the messages given to you by Mr. Hume are sincere and genuine in their motivation and that they represent the authentic attitude of the Republican Movement.

I understand that you also have reservations about the ability of the leadership concerned to deliver agreements, especially agreements about a truce. Speaking, first, from my own contact with the situation, I can say that, personally, I have no doubts about their ability to deliver agreements in any area, once they had formally committed themselves to them. In view, however, of your own reservations and as a further re-assurance to you, I decided to check on this issue. As a result, I received an authoritative and categorical assurance that my own assessment of it is correct.

I would like now to make some comments which I hope will help you to make a true and accurate assessment of the present attitude of the people with whom we are dealing and also of the opportunity of making peace with them which, as I have said, I am certain is now available to us.

In making these comments, I hope you will not misunderstand me if, at times I use the language and the terminology of the Republican movement. I do so only because I believe that, to understand their attitudes, one must listen to their own way of putting things.

(1) The present military and political leadership is, in my long experience and from all the evidence available to me, the most moderate and the most political leadership of modern times, at least, that is, since the present 'troubles' began in 1969. This, however, is a situation which, through circumstance or another, could change very quickly. I mention this factor as a worrying one because, in practice, it means that every delay in making agreements endangers the present opportunity for making peace.

(2) To protect the confidence of everyone concerned, especially that of the British authorities, in a situation where, as yet, no formal agreements about a truce have been made, the Republican leadership has been observing the strictest secrecy concerning the contacts that are being made through Mr. Hume. As a result, only a few people on the Republican side know anything about them. This means that the I.R.A. as 'an army in the field' has no knowledge of them at any of its planning, intelligence or operational levels. Any attempt to interfere openly and directly with this situation would, it seems, raise questions and cause the kind of talking that would inevitably endanger the confidentiality of the present contacts.

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While understanding that this is a genuine problem, I have constantly urged that, under some heading which would not endanger confidentiality, and in view of the need to create a proper atmosphere for peace-talks, the activities of the I.R.A. should be stopped at least to the point where people are no longer the targets. You will understand that, in this kind of argument, one has to use the language of the people concerned if one is to have any effect and that, at times at least, one has to work with the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread.

I believe that my arguments have not been entirely in vain and that they have had some effect. The fact remains, however, that, until a formal agreement is made about a truce, the absolute need to protect everybody's confidence must place restrictions on what the leadership concerned can safely do, even with the best intentions, to respond positively to my arguments. One has also to contend with the fact that, at the present stage of the contacts, where an agreement about a truce has not been reached and where we are still only talking about talks, uncertainty about the future progress of the contacts and even about whether talks will ever take place together with doubts and mistrust engendered by a long history of suspicion and hostility will continue to weigh against my arguments and against the kind of decisions for which I have been asking.

The point I am making in all this is that, until a formal truce has been agreed, the activities of the I.R.A. should not be related to the contacts being made through Mr. Hume because, at its active levels, it has no knowledge of these contacts. Please God, it will continue to keep a low profile but, if anything more atrocious than usual should happen, it should not be interpreted as a comment on the present contacts or as an attempt to influence them or, most important of all perhaps, as a sign that the leadership concerned are not sincere in their dealings with us.

(3) The official response to 'the document' is, as I see it, a very significant one because it represents a change, not only of approach, but also of attitude to the whole question of holding talks with the British authorities.

Up to now, the official approach to such talks has been that "we will talk but, at the same time, we will continue to fight". The fact that, now, an official message, bearing the highest authority of the I.R.A. has been sent to you through a person of Mr. Hume's standing and integrity, of which I, whom I know from long experience they would not deceive, is in itself significant but even more is the fact that, in this message, there is no suggestion of talking and fighting at the same time. This significance, in particular, should not be missed because, as I read it, it represents a deliberate change in what, up to then, had been official policy.

For the past twelve years or so, that is, since the break-down of the last I.R.A. truce in 1975 (as I know, only too well from long and sad experience), the official policy towards peace talks with the British authorities was essentially one. It was based on the principle that there was only one solution to the conflict - a formal declaration by the British authorities that they intended to withdraw from Ireland.

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It was a principle that admitted no possibility of compromise and, for that reason, there was, in the mind of the I.R.A., only one realistic way of implementing it - war, a war that would go on and on until the British authorities finally agreed to make this declaration. There was, therefore, they said again and again, no point in calling truces, no point even in holding peace talks with anyone except on their own agenda for a British withdrawal.

This, as I have said, was essentially a military policy and it explains why we have to face the almost incredible fact that it is now twelve years at least since the I.R.A. last called an official truce, even for the few days of Christmas. It also explains their obduracy in the face of every effort, every pressure and every argument put forth, during those years, to persuade them to change. In the face, for example, of constant appeals and condemnations from religious, political and commercial leaders, the moral pressures of peace-movements, the military pressures of security forces, they consistently refused, not only to stop, but even to call a temporary halt. The Pope went down on his knees to implore them to stop but even his appeal was immediately dismissed. They were told, again and again, that no politician of any influence would speak to them and that there would be no place for them at any peace table unless they called a truce but, again and again, even this argument was rejected out of hand. During all those years, even a month's truce was, for them, too high a price to pay for the opportunity to speak to any Government or any political or religious leader, no matter what his influence might be.

It is probably true to say that nobody knows the truth of all this better than I do because of my involvement in peace-making over those years. It was, as I have said, an almost incredible policy, the full explanation of which lies outside the scope of this letter, except to say that it shows how the Republican movement, during those years, was in the grip of unyielding, almost fanatical, military minds.

We come, then, to the message sent recently to you and, once again, I believe we are presented with an almost incredible fact - a revolution or, at the very least, the beginning of a revolution in the official attitude of the I.R.A. to peace talks with the British authorities. We shall see this if we look again at the message which, as I have said, bears the highest authority, was placed in the hands of Mr. Hume and witnessed by me. It says that the I.R.A. are willing to communicate with the British authorities, in a spirit of political dialogue, on the whole question of ^{VEAC 041} peace provided this dialogue is face-to-face. In other words, the old conditions for peace talks with the British authorities are left out of the message. Only one condition is laid down - that the dialogue must take place through their own representatives and not through intermediaries.

The clear implication of this message, then, is that the Republican movement has its own scenario for peace and that, in any political dialogue with the British, it will stand by and uphold the significance of its basic principles but, in view of the explanation of present British policy given to them by Mr. Hume in his comments on 'the document', they will, at the same time, listen carefully to the British point of view and study their present scenario: for peace with a view to discovering common ground and to seeing if and how the principles of their own scenario

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Since then we have found a common ground between the two

can be reconciled with the principles of the British one.

You will remember that there was a rather long delay between the time they received the document and the time they sent their response to it. My reading of this is that a lot of hard thinking and hard discussion took place, not only on the political and peace implications of the document itself but, also and especially, on Mr. Hume's explanation of them. The result was that they decided to adopt a policy of political dialogue, the policy which Mr. Hume and I had been urging on them.

You will also remember that, at the time the response was sent to 'the document', another document, entitled "A Scenario for Peace" was published by the Sinn Fein Party. I mention this because I believe that the official description of this document, the main principle it enunciates, the procedure it sets out for the initial implementation of this principle and the timing of its publication are all related to the process of peace-making in which we are engaged and have a significant and deliberately intended message for it.

Scenario for Peace!

The first thing to note about this document is that it is officially described as "a discussion paper". This fact alone has a special significance for what we are trying to do because it implies, as you know, that the solutions and the programmes for peace set out in it are open to adaptation and change. Here again, we see the signs of a new approach, of a new willingness to deal with Republican principles in the context of political dialogue rather than in the context of physical force. The political spirit of the Sinn Fein document reflects, therefore, the political spirit of the message sent in response to the other document and is another sign that that message was sincere.

The main principle of the Sinn Fein scenario for peace (the cardinal and, at the end of the day, the only principle of the I.R.A. when it comes to making peace) is that the Irish people as a whole have the right to self-determination. Their document argues in favour of this and then sets out the procedure through which, in their view, the implementation of this principle would be initially organised - an All-Ireland Constitutional Convention of the elected representatives of all the Irish people.

The next point to note is that the publication of the Sinn Fein document co-incided with the arrival of the official response to the 'sent' document. This, I believe, was not a mere co-incidence and, for that reason, I also believe that the published document was, in fact, an initial response to the implications of the confidential one as explained by Mr. Hume, a veiled but deliberate Republican commentary on them. Given that this reading of the relationship between the two documents is correct, the fact that this commentary was made public in the setting of a discussion paper is very significant because it shows an intention to open up the kind of public debate and discussion, even within the Republican movement itself, which paves the way for new approaches, new ideas and new ways of interpreting old ideals and principles. Given that this was, at least, one of its purposes, the Sinn Fein "Scenario for Peace" must be seen, not only as an instrument of political dialogue but also as an instrument of political development and change. In suggesting

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this correspondence between the two documents, I am going on the time relationship between the publication of one and the sending of the response to the other and also on the natural presumption that the main political advisor on the contents of the published document was also the main political advisor on the contents of the message sent in response to the confidential one.

Evidence that the two documents relate to each other, by design rather than co-incidence, can also be found in the documents themselves.

The Sinn Fein document, as I have already said, has two main statements. The first relates to the principle of self-determination and the second to an All-Ireland Constitutional Convention.

The confidential document, also, has two main statements. One relates to British self-interest in Ireland and declares that it no longer exists and the other expresses a willingness, not only to facilitate, but even to encourage a political Conference between the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland and the elected representatives of the people of the Republic.

Here we can immediately see that, while the two main statements in one document are not the same as the two main statements in the other, they resemble and correspond to each other. The statement about self-determination resembles and corresponds to the statement about British self-interest in Ireland and the idea of an All-Ireland Constitutional Convention resembles and corresponds to the idea of a Conference between the representatives of Northern Ireland and the representatives of the Republic.

I believe, then, that we are witnessing a revolution or, at least, the beginning of a revolution, in the official attitude of the I.R.A. to the whole question of holding talks with the British authorities. From a position on this matter which was essentially a military, they have changed or, at least, are changing to a position which is essentially political.

Keeping in mind the points I have made above, we come to the one condition for dialogue with the British authorities which the I.R.A. laid down in their recent message. They are willing to discuss 'the document' and its implications for present British policy but only face-to-face, only, that is, through their own representatives and not through intermediaries.

Given that they are now taking up a position of dialogue in relation to British policy, a position of political give and take, in which the art of persuasion and the force of argument rather than the dictate of the gun are the instruments for reaching agreements, it is perfectly understandable and, I believe, perfectly reasonable that they should lay down this condition. Going on the principle that politics is the art of the possible, it would be very difficult and, indeed, politically speaking, impossible for the leadership of any party but especially for the leadership of the Republican movement, entrenched as it is in hard-line traditional attitudes, to engage in a process of political persuasion, in relation both to their opponents and to their own followers, which could involve adaptations, developments and new interpretations of their own policies, through the mediation of other people who did not belong to their own party. In other words, having taken up a position of dialogue, they have no choice except to insist on face-to-face discussion, if this position is to be developed. Dialogue through intermediaries is not really dialogue.

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The condition laid down for comment and discussion on 'the document' and its implications for peace should be seen, therefore, not so much as a condition, but as a description of the next natural step they have to take if any further progress is to be made. It should not be seen, therefore, as a sinister attempt to trick or to trap the British authorities but as the sign of a sincere desire to capitalize on the present opportunity for peace and to ensure that it is handled properly. In other words, the condition laid down in their recent ~~statements~~ ^{statements}, I believe, another sign of their sincerity and of their genuine commitment to co-operate with Mr. Hume and myself and, indeed, with the British authorities.

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(4) The question of a truce naturally arises in this whole situation and here it should be clear, first of all, that the I.R.A. have not, as yet, been formally asked about their position on it. Mr. Hume did say to me that the British authorities would not speak to the I.R.A. while the I.R.A. continued their campaign and five or six weeks ago, that is, before your 1st formal message, I made soundings which had to be discreet because of the danger of raising suspicions about the intentions of the British authorities and, indeed, of everyone else concerned.

As a result, my understanding now is that if, on conditions, the British were prepared to speak directly to the I.R.A., the I.R.A. would be prepared to facilitate them. This, as you know, is the language of diplomacy and so we can only go on interpretations of what it means. At the least, it is a positive rather than a negative signal and my own interpretation of it is that the I.R.A. would be prepared to call a truce if the British authorities agreed to speak to them directly.

Here, as I have said, I am interpreting the language of diplomacy in a context where, up to now, no formal request for a truce and no formal conditions for direct talks have been put to them. Going, however, on my own experience, I am certain that, if the British authorities agreed to direct talks, the I.R.A. could, at the least, be persuaded to call a "private" truce before the talks would actually take place.

A "private" truce would mean that the I.R.A. would, formally but confidentially, agree to stop all offensive activities for a stated period of say three weeks or so, so that an initial meeting, at least, could take place between their representatives and the representatives of the British authorities in an atmosphere of peace and good-will and in a context where the British authorities would have a formal guarantee that around the time of such a meeting, they would not be embarrassed by any I.R.A. activity.

It should also be understood that, in a "private" truce situation, the I.R.A. would not expect the British authorities to reciprocate in terms of the normal activities of their security forces because they would understand that, for reasons of confidentiality at least, it would be impossible for them to do so.

In saying all this about a "private" truce, I am not, in any way, discounting or, much less, ruling out the possibility of a public one if the British authorities were to agree to direct talks. I am merely stating my own conviction that, were they to do so, the I.R.A. could be persuaded to call, at least, a "private" truce which, in turn, could set the stage for a public one.

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You may be wondering why, in the context of the present contacts, the I.R.A. have not, to date, sent any formal message about their attitude to a truce. There is nothing suspect or surprising about this because, as I have already said, they have not, as yet, been formally asked about it and also because they were waiting for a formal reply to their own verbal response to 'the document'.

Here, it should also be remembered that neither the Sinn Fein party nor the I.R.A. have ever taken any initiative with regard to the present contacts. The initiative, as you know, came completely from myself and Mr. Hume. This means that, up to now, they have acted at our invitation and under our persuasion, a persuasion that has had to overcome a reluctance, on their part, to do anything which might be interpreted as a sign of weakness by the British authorities, especially while they are in contact with them through intermediaries. This, I believe, is why they have not, so far, taken any initiative or volunteered any positive suggestion themselves beyond what they said in their response to 'the document'. Given this passive attitude to the present contacts and their fear of being misunderstood by the British authorities, it is not surprising, as I have said, that they have made no suggestions about a truce or volunteered any information about their attitude to calling one.

You are naturally concerned, I understand, by media reports of a recent article in the "Republican News", which re-stated the I.R.A. policy of "talking and fighting" at the same time and which would appear, therefore, to contradict what I have said above. This article and the I.R.A. statement it quotes should be ignored, as far as the present contacts are concerned, because they do not, in any way, relate to them. I say this on the highest authority after carefully checking the authorship and the background of the article. The author in question knows nothing whatsoever about the contacts which are being made through Mr. Hume. The article, an historical report on past events, had been available, for some time, in the office of the "Republican News" before it was finally used as "a filler". The statement it quotes made more than six years ago, at the height of the hunger-strike crisis, by an I.R.A. leadership which is no longer in office. It is out-of-date, therefore, and should not be used as a guide to the policy of the present leadership. The guide for this is the message sent recently to you which should be taken and dealt with on its own merits.

There were, as you know, two previous truces during the present 'troubles', one in 1972 and the other in 1974. The first lasted for about two weeks and the second for about fifteen months.

Both of these truces failed to bring peace and it is important to see why they failed so that, for the future and especially for our present enterprise, we may learn from the lessons of the past. I can speak with personal knowledge here because I have carefully investigated the causes of these failures by speaking, on many occasions, to some of the leading people who were involved in them.

I am certain from these investigations and also from my own experience of peace-making and peace-keeping in conflict situations that communication between the I.R.A. and the British authorities was the main problem during these truces and that they finally broke down because of a fatal weakness in this area.

The crucial role in peace-making and peace-keeping belongs to the person who interprets one side to the other, especially when the conflict has reached the

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size of military confrontation and, even more especially, when this kind of confrontation has the historical and political background of the conflict in Ireland, where the gulf of misunderstanding, mistrust and hostility, which has to be bridged, is centuries old.

I believe that communication in this kind of peace-making needs a special life-line because the conflict has been so bitter and the gulf between the conflicting parties so wide. By this, I mean a life-line through which the suspicions, apprehensions, misunderstandings, distorted views and the significance of words or of actions which may be causing doubts and hesitations, are interpreted and explained to one side or the other as the need arises but especially when these negative influences are causing either side to back away from the peace-making process.

This life-line would also communicate and, above all, guarantee the good intentions, the sincerity and the general honour and integrity of the other side so that those attitudes of trust, the crucial factor for success in peace-making, are gradually built up between the two sides and between them and the peace-making process itself.

I believe, then, that, to prevent a break-down in the peace-making process and, much more important, to guarantee its success a special life-line of interpretation, explanation and re-assurance must be set up between the conflicting parties. I also believe that the lack of such a life-line was the main cause of break-down in the truces of 1972 and 1974, the fatal weakness to which I have referred above.

As we may now be entering a new truce situation which we don't want to break down, we shall have to think of a person who, because of his qualifications for the task, could provide this special life-line for it; a person who, whatever his personal opinions about the conflict might be, is able to take an ^{an} ~~an~~ ^{objective} stance between the I.R.A. position and the British position, who has the trust of both sides, the knowledge of their negative and positive attitudes, the political and negotiating skills and the personal integrity to fit him for this responsibility.

I believe that, by God's grace, such a person is available to us in Mr. Hume and I also believe that if he agrees, in any new truce situation, to act as the special life-line I have described above, the truce will not break down but will succeed because, as I have already said, I am convinced from long knowledge and experience that an interpreter like him is the secret of success, an interpreter whose contribution, in the final analysis, is to bring a presence to the peace-making process which gives the hope of peace, the hope which everyone concerned needs first and most of all.

(5) While a formal response to the last message sent through Mr. Hume has not been given as yet, the indications are they will regard it as too negative and that there is, therefore, very little more they can say at the present beyond what they have already said in their response to the 'document'. They insist that their intentions are honourable and genuine and that they will deliver and abide by any agreements that may be made. They, therefore, reject and resent the suggestion that they are not being sincere or that they could not deliver agreements.

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While I believe that they will agree to keep their doors open to the present contacts, I also believe that they will not agree to negotiate or, much less, to enter into agreements through intermediaries.

As we now seem to be reaching an impasse in the present contacts, I would like, respectfully, to make one or two suggestions about ways and means of breaking it.

The first would be that one of your representatives should speak, in confidence, to Mr. Gerry Adams M.P. with a view to giving him a direct explanation of present British policy as it is expressed in 'the document' and also with a view to assessing directly for yourself his attitude to this policy and the efforts he is prepared to make to adapt Republican policy to it.

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I realise that you may find it difficult to differentiate between a meeting with Mr. Adams and a meeting with a representative of the I.R.A. but I am certain there is a difference, at least the difference between speaking to a politician and speaking to a military leader.

If it would ease your decision on this suggestion, I could use my influence with Mr. Adams to persuade him to attend such a meeting, not in his capacity as the leader of the Sinn Fein party but as the Member of Parliament for West Belfast or even in a private capacity as a personal friend of my own.

I would like now to say something about my knowledge of Mr. Adams both as a person and as a political leader.

For the past four years or so, that is, since this present enterprise began, I have been involved with him, on a regular basis, in the search for peace. During that time, I have never known him, in his relationships with me, to practise any kind of deceit or duplicity or to make any attempt to use me. On the contrary, I have always found him to be completely honest and completely sincere and, for that reason, I have no hesitation in saying that he is a person of honour and integrity.

As I have said, about four years ago, he began (not for the first time) to co-operate with me in the search for peace and so I have had plenty of time and opportunity to judge his abilities as a politician. We have worked, and still do, on the principle that the only way to lead the Republican movement away from the use of physical force is to create an alternative political force for achieving the aims of the Nationalist people of Ireland which will be powerful enough to convince the Republican movement (including Mr. Adams himself) that the use of physical force is no longer necessary. It is not the purpose of this letter to discuss this principle or to describe the efforts we have made, and are still making, to put it into practice, except to say that my purpose in working with him is to find a political way to end the bloodshed in Northern Ireland and his purpose in working with me is to help in the creation of a political force on the Nationalist side of the conflict which, by combining the political energies of the Nationalist people as a whole in a common policy for peace, would, in terms of the mind and the convictions of the Republican movement, form a credible alternative to the use of physical force and provide for the Nationalist-Republican cause, a completely political way of achieving its aims.

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Since his political ability and influence may be crucial to the success of the enterprise on which we are engaged, I would like now to give my own impression of him as a political leader. In giving this impression, I am commenting on his political abilities as such and not on how he uses them. This is a matter for his own decision and must be judged by criteria which are different from the ones I am using here.

I believe that, as a politician, he belongs to the highest rank or, at least, that he has the qualities to reach the highest rank. He has, in my opinion, the political shrewdness and decisiveness, the thoroughness in work, the ability to analyse the dynamics of a political situation, the judgement in calculating risks and the courage in taking them, the astuteness in relating to other politicians, and, in general, that natural capacity for the art of politics which would fit him for a place in the cabinet of any Government.

These abilities have been conditioned and, to some extent, clouded by his political upbringing in the Republican tradition, the conflict-pressures of his work and his experiences during 'the troubles' of the past twenty years, a background which tends to colour his approach to political situations and to prejudice his attitudes to other politicians. He is aware, however, of the influences on him of this background and is prepared to take them into account in making assessments and in coming to decisions. I believe, therefore, that he tries and intends to be fair and objective in his political judgements.

As I know him, then, his Republican convictions are free from fanaticism and he has the potential, I believe, to become a true statesman.

I said above that speaking to Mr. Adams as the leader of the Sinn Fein party would not be the same as speaking to a representative of the I.R.A. I did so because, in my experience, the Sinn Party and the I.R.A. are two separate organisations, separate in leadership, membership, structures and tactics. Sinn Fein, especially under its present leadership, is a political party in its own right and with its own character. Like other political parties in Ireland, it has its own leadership, its own policies and structures, its own elected representatives and political supporters.

It is a mistake, therefore, to believe that the Sinn Fein party is a puppet of the I.R.A. or merely a front for it, that it lacks any independence of leadership or approach. I am saying this because I am convinced that the consequences of this mistake have been, and may continue to be, tragic in terms of the relationship between the ostracization of the Sinn Fein party and the prolongation of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

I won't develop this point any further except to say that the quality of the present Sinn Fein leadership and their freedom to initiate and organise their own policies were illustrated at their 1986 Annual Conference when the long-standing policy of Dail abstentionism was reversed without significant splits or upheavals - a fundamental development which even people like Michael Collins, Eamonn de Valera and others, including the leaders of Sinn Fein at the time of the split in 1970, could not accomplish. This fact alone indicates the ability of the present

*Wed Adams
confirms?*

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Sinn Fein leaders to take great personal and political risks, to make great changes and to move forward to new political horizons.

I would like, next, to suggest another way of breaking the impasse we now seem to have reached. This impasse, such as it is, has arisen, I believe, because, on the one hand, the British authorities were waiting for the leadership concerned to say they would call a truce provided talks would be held and, on the other hand, the leadership concerned were waiting for the British authorities to say that talks would be held provided a truce would be called.

*This assumes
HMG could
talk to
IRA*

The question, then, is, who should take the next step? As neither side may wish to take the initiative at the present time and as, up to now, the initiative has been with Mr. Hume and myself, I believe that we should take the next step by asking two hypothetical questions - "if the British authorities were willing to hold talks would the leadership concerned be willing to call a truce?" and "if the leadership concerned were willing to call a truce would the British authorities be willing to hold talks?" This, as I have said, is only a suggestion but, if responses were given to these questions, the situation would, at least, be clarified.

Given your concern about the sincerity of the leadership in question, I trust that what I have said in this letter about it will help to allay your fears. I have personally no doubt whatsoever about the honour of their intentions at the present time and in relation to the present contacts although I know this may appear to contradict information that is available to you and, especially, the sinister implications of the recent arrests near your home.

I would like to say, first of all, in relation to these ~~ARRESTS~~ that I would personally abhor and condemn any attempt by anyone to cause death or injury to you or to any British politician. My only reason for helping to initiate the present contacts and for continuing to be involved in them, in spite of all the problems and pressures, and, indeed, my only reason for writing this letter, is to do what I can to end forever the very possibility of such attacks.

My fear now is that, if evidence available to you indicates that the I.R.A. were, in fact, involved in what was happening near your home, you will take this as a clear sign that their leadership are not being sincere in their dealings with Mr. Hume and myself or in the contacts being made through him and that you will, as a result, decide that you should not speak to them at the present time. I fully understand why, in view of all the circumstances, you should think like this. All I can say is that even if it were proved today that the I.R.A. were involved, I would still stand by my conviction and my certainty that their leadership, in relation to the present contacts, ~~and that~~ and that their intentions are honourable and genuine. I say this for the reasons set out in the earlier part of this letter (which was drafted before I heard the news of the arrests near your home) and also for reasons related to my knowledge of the way the I.R.A. is organised which I shall explain verbally to Mr. Hume and which he will explain verbally to you.

I would like, however, here to point to another recent event which could be interpreted as a clear sign that the I.R.A. leadership are sincere and that their

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intentions are honourable.

You will remember how, in August last, the holiday plans of Mr. Nicholas Fenn, the British Ambassador in Dublin, were in the hands of the I.R.A. before his holiday took place and how they claimed that, although they could have organised an attack on him, they had decided not to but, instead, had decided to leak the information they had about his holiday to the press. This claim was made in an official statement which was published in the "Republican News" on the 20.8.87.

Was there a relationship between the decision not to attack Mr. Fenn and the contacts being made through Mr. Hume? I believe there was or, at least, that it would not be an unreasonable interpretation of this whole rather strange event, to say that there was, namely, that the I.R.A. leadership decided not to attack the Ambassador because of the present contacts and that, to ensure that none of their units on the ground would attack him, they leaked the information they had about his movements and the fact that they had it to the media because in circumstances where, for reasons of confidentiality, they could not explain their decision to their people on the ground, this was the best way to prevent any possibility of an attack on him. They were, on this interpretation, warning the authorities that Mr. Fenn was in danger.

Be that as it may, my fear now is that, in view of the arrests near your home, you will decide not to speak to the I.R.A. at the present time with the result that a real opportunity to make peace with them will be endangered and even lost.

I am certain, indeed, that, by God's grace, we have, at the present time, not only a real opportunity to make peace with the Republican movement but also to open the door to a just and lasting peace for every party and every interest concerned in the present conflict. I can only trust and pray that, again by God's grace, these opportunities will continue to be used and developed until they are brought to success.

This has been a very long letter but I trust you have been patient with me because of the importance of the matters it discusses, matters, really, of life and death.

I know that you will regard this letter as strictly confidential and personal to yourself.

With kindest regards and praying that God may bless you and your family and protect you now and always,

Yours Sincerely,

Alex Reid C.Ss.R.

Alex Reid C.Ss.R.