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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

28 October, 1993

Confidential

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
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Mr F Murray
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Dear Assistant Secretary

Taoiseach's meeting with Prime Minister en marge
of European Council 29 October

As you know, the Secretariat has not been involved with the Hume/Adams initiative, but we have received a variety of comments from Ministers, senior officials and top ranking senior members of the security forces. What follows is a personal assessment of underlying views most of which have already been reported in the past year. We have no knowledge of what the Prime Minister may say tomorrow or of the line he may take with the press (although it appears from this afternoon's exchanges in the Commons that the Prime Minister sees at least a presentational advantage in the Taoiseach's speech last evening).

Hume/Adams

The views we get here show a deep scepticism about Hume/Adams. The judgement we hear most often is that the chances of any settlement acceptable to all the other parties and to the IRA are close to negligible; that Adams cannot deliver the IRA on any proposals that might be workable; that if he seeks to do so, he will be disowned and replaced (or worse); that while the IRA may lay down their arms, they will not do so unconditionally; that their condition will be a recognition of the IRA position on self-determination which the British Government could not possibly give or appear to give without destroying itself politically; and that, in any event, they will not give up their arms pending the conclusion of the negotiation. Hence the Government's apparent determination to keep its distance from the initiative and to set the price of Sinn Fein's admission to any kind of talks very high.

There is also a view, however, that Sinn Fein/IRA may split if pressure is maintained. A split in Sinn Fein is not the only one the Government might like to see. They hope for a split in the Nationalist side generally, or at least in the SDLP (recently, a very senior person here suggested to me that the Hume/Adams initiative could well result in the departure of both leaders). They have already successfully encouraged the UUP to break with the DUP; and they see a good prospect of a deal being done between the more "reasonable" Nationalists and Molyneux's party.

That calculation lies behind the repeated declarations by both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State that the only message they are interested in hearing from the IRA is that they have renounced violence permanently, a renunciation which they will also be required to verify over a period of time. It may be worth pointing out that this policy was first set out in the Secretary of State's Coleraine speech last December. That speech was deliberately intended to target the nationalist/republican side. The policy line on renunciation was inserted at a late stage in the drafting and was intended to convey a very deliberate political message not just to Sinn Fein/IRA, but to ourselves and to some on the British side, including the then GOC, who were at that stage hoping for an IRA ceasefire and who wished to encourage that prospect by letting it be known that any diminishing activity by the IRA would be responded to by the British Army.

While that line has been maintained, other positive elements in that speech have not been repeated; these are that there is no British blueprint or masterplan, that there is a British wish to see broad agreement developing on the constitutional issue, that the Government is a facilitator of the democratic will with no self interest leading it to pursue a separate agenda of its own, and that it is not steering in a particular pre-determined direction. All of this has been replaced this year by statements of four-square support for the Union from the Prime Minister and signals from the Secretary of State that the main focus of the talks will be on how Northern Ireland shall be governed within the United Kingdom.

"The Deal"

The common view here is that there was no "deal" as such with the Unionists in the Summer, but that "there did not need to be" as one senior official put it to me. The Parliamentary arithmetic and the assurance of ongoing UUP support for Mr. Major means inevitably that the Government will make concessions in return. It is assumed that a select committee, a reform of the Order-in-Council system and, possibly, enhanced powers for local Councils will come about in the near future. In regard to a select committee, you will know that in recent months the British have been repeating the mantra that this is a matter for the House of Commons and, privately, that it is a reasonable proposal which the great majority of the Commons support. We have found acute sensitivity, however, on three points

- that the Government previously stated in the period from 1990, most recently via the leader of the House on 26 July 1993, that this a matter the Government (my emphasis) keep under review;
- that the Government have previously advised the Committee on Procedure that it would be best not to proceed with a select committee pending the outcome of the talks initiative, advice which the Committee on Procedure sought and accepted; and

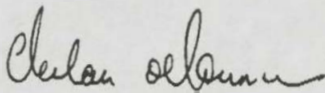
that in letters to the Committee, Molyneux has sought to re-open the matter on the grounds that the talks are terminated and that there is no suggestion of a resumption (his letter to the committee of 12 January 1993); these are grounds which were ignored when Molyneux last wrote to the Committee on 24 July 1991 and completely contradict stated Government policy that the talks process is ongoing and that its objectives remain valid and achievable.

Waning of the three-stranded Talks ?

It has been noticeable this year that not only have the Government got off their "neutral" fence in relation to declarations of support for the Union, they have also moved very much in Molyneux's direction in regard to the three-stranded process. The Secretary of State has suggested that the round table meetings will not resume and that the process of bilateral discussions conducted by the British Government is in fact the method by which not only progress, but a conclusion, will be reached.

It has been put to me, when I have raised questions about the Secretary of State's views, that he is in fact much more deeply committed to the three-stranded process than is the Prime Minister; and that the combination of delay in the talks process while Hume/Adams goes on, pressure within the Conservative Party to return to core values including "law and order", and the need to respond to Unionist support in a tight parliamentary situation, is prompting the Prime Minister to adopt a "care and maintenance" approach to Northern Ireland. This attitude may have been reflected already in the Home Secretary's decision to exclude Adams from Britain, a decision I have been told informally was taken against the advice of the NIO.

Yours sincerely



Declan O'Donovan
Joint Secretary