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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Fairiseach,

This report details the NI developments which I mentioned to you in Scrabothe this a.m.

Given the tone of last Friday's Anglo-Irish liaison group meeting, it seems unlikely that the British will come close to accepting the Adams' text.

W

24.03

SECRET

Contacts with Mr. John Hume

1. I was in contact with Mr. Hume over the weekend, to find out the result of his meeting with Mr. Gerry Adams on Friday.
2. Mr. Adams had considered that the Secretary of State's letter of 17th March to Mr. Hume did not advance matters in any material way, compared to the November 28th statement.
3. Mr. Adams gave to Mr. Hume a series of draft replies which, according to Mr. Hume, would lead to an IRA ceasefire. Mr. Hume passed those on to the British Government on Saturday.
4. The new text, while in presentational terms leaning to reassurance of the Republican side on admission to talks, is in substance for the most part within the parameters of existing British policy. One exception would be the last sentence in the reply to question 2, "In the event of an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994 the Secretary of State would invite Sinn Féin to nominate a team to participate, from that point, in the negotiations." On the face of it, this would appear to air-brush out any notion of a waiting period.
5. The draft also states that "The British and Irish Governments are committed to an agreed timeframe and calendar for the conduct of the negotiations." This is also beyond the limits of existing British - and to a more limited extent Irish - policy.

6. Mr. Hume had no reaction as yet from the British Government, and assumed that consideration of the draft would take some time in their system. (The emphasis at our Liaison Group meeting with the British on Friday was very much on their refusal of any form of negotiation, and insistence on publication of the Secretary of State's letter to Hume, to forestall any such imputation. It remains to be seen, therefore, how far they will enter into discussion on this new text.)
7. I met also at his request over the weekend with Fr. Brendan Callanan (Fr. Alex Reid's superior). He did not seem to be aware of the latest transaction, and I did not mention it. However, one interpretation of recent developments is that the internal debate in the Republican movement is strengthening in terms of an early restoration of the ceasefire.
8. I had a call also over the weekend from Ms. Trina Vargo, of Senator Kennedy's office. While Senator Kennedy was disappointed at the lack of positive response to his proposals from either the British Government or Sinn Féin, Ms. Vargo believes that it could be useful to have some follow-up on the issue, not least to stress to Sinn Féin that the options and "windows of opportunity" were rapidly running out. She proposes to visit London, Belfast and Dublin in the course of this week.

This is good.

Seán

Seán Ó hUiginn
24 March 1997

Encls: Q & A given to Mr. Hume by Mr. Adams

cc

~~PST~~
~~PSS~~

Mr. Doolan