

CONFIDENTIAL - POLICY

ASST/
SEC

1 DEC 1997

C.C.R.U.

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AAUNDER/
SEC

CeSg/12

18 DEC 1997

CENT SEC

From the Principal Private Secretary

16 December 1997

Dear Gen,

Mrs McLennan

BLOODY SUNDAY

Obs 1/12
1.4 in Ferguson
2.4 in [redacted]
[redacted]
1F.4

As you know, Dr Mowlam is keen to make the attached statement in late December or early January. The Prime Minister has looked at this. His view now is that Dr Mowlam may be right that a statement on these lines, before it is clear no further action can be taken, may go down better than one where that option is already closed off. The present draft is well-constructed. But before agreeing, the Prime Minister would like to be clear about the views of the Ministry of Defence and to know the latest state of play on [redacted]

The Prime Minister would also like to be clearer about the circumstances in which such a statement would be made. An interview would not be suitable for such a carefully worded piece. A speech would be better, or perhaps an article. There is also the question of timing. Releasing such a statement on eg 29 December, when there may be virtually no other news around, guarantees maximum publicity (and maximum scope for critical reaction from all quarters). This needs further thought, and may point to early in the New Year, when the Government machine may be better placed to deal with the inevitable fall-out.

We also need to think through how to prepare the various parties involved beforehand. We must give the Irish advance notice, as well as the main parties, including the Unionists. We have also undertaken to brief the Opposition in advance.

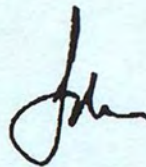
Finally, Christopher Meyer's telegram No. 2675 usefully reminds us of the importance of Irish America, although we cannot of course satisfy that constituency, any more than the others. His telegram also illustrates the need to explain carefully why we do not favour another enquiry, while we are pursuing the one specific allegation we think might have some new substance.

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I am copying this letter this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Mike Venables (Ministry of Defence), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours ever



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

PS/SCS B&L
PS/ Mr Murphy B&L
PS/ Mr Ingham B&L
PS/ Mrs B&L
PS/ Mr Sample Mr Woods
Mr Thomas Mr Donnell
Mr Steele Mr Macdonald
Mr Bostan* Mr Hill
Mr Stephens Mr Beavan
Mr Leach Mr Ferguson
Mr Watkins

* Co-ordinate advice on paras 2 B&L by 4pm Friday 19 Dec.

RESTRICTED-POLICY

A STATEMENT ON *BLOODY SUNDAY*
ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT

I want to make a statement about the deaths on Bloody Sunday.

On Sunday January 30th 1972 British soldiers opened fire in the streets of Londonderry. Thirteen civilians were killed and others injured. There have been many other deaths since that day - over 3,000 in all. None of these deaths have been easy to bear - least of all for the bereaved families. The pain and suffering felt by those left behind never goes away. But in the words of one of my favourite writers Maya Angelou, "History, despite its wrench and pain cannot be unlived: but if faced with courage, need to be lived again".

I was not in Derry on that Sunday a generation ago. I cannot know all that happened to all those who were. I do know that circumstances brought people together with fatal consequences. It was wrong that unarmed people were shot and killed. It should not have happened. I wish it had not happened. On behalf of the Government of the United Kingdom, I am sorry that it happened.

The Widgery Tribunal was established at the time. As Widgery said then, it was not concerned with making moral judgements; its task was to try and form an objective view of the events. I am sorry too that the Tribunal clearly did not convince everybody that it had got to the truth, and that all the available evidence was adequately considered. That has been another cause of grievance felt by many over the years. But I do not think re-opening the enquiry would help. Too much time has passed for us to be able to be sure the whole truth could be found.

We must all take our share of responsibility for what has happened in Northern Ireland. We are all going to have to change, we are all going to have to compromise, and we are all going to have to understand our histories - not forget the past - but not live in it. If we can have the strength together to do that we have a chance to build a better future.

The material put before us by the Irish Government, John Hume and representatives of the victims' families contained serious new allegations which were not made to the Widgery Tribunal. Those allegations suggested a possible source of further evidence and I have instructed a senior independent lawyer to investigate this further. We shall take

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AJH/NW/STATEMEN.DOC

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whatever action is required consistent with the law, when this has been done.

Following the investigation we will make a further statement and, in addition, will make all documentation we have received publicly available.

Nothing will bring those who died back to us. I don't suppose that anything I say will make the loss felt by their families better. But I truly believe that the sorrow we share at what happened can help to build the reconciliation which Northern Ireland needs. And that in confronting this dark page in our shared history we will be better able to find a lasting peace. In that hope lies justice for all those whose lives have been scarred by the past.

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TOTAL P.04

Telegram
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16 DEC 1997
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Text

FM FCO 675
BT

FSX616
LNSXAN 9479 WBLNAN 8195
Internal Addressees
Action:

Info:

Date: 151700Z DEC 97

Originator: WASHINGTON

Telegram Number: 2675

ADDRESSEES:
TO IMMEDIATE FCO

PROTECTIVE MARKING:
RESTRICTED RESTRICTED

Subject: BLOODY SUNDAY

AND TO IMMEDIATE NIOL, NIOB
AND TO PRIORITY DUBLIN, BIS NEW YORK, BOSTON, ACTOR, CAOFF

NIO for PS/SOSNI, PUS, Thomas and Beeton (REL); No 10 for Powell
and Holmes; FCO for PUS and Tebbit; Cabinet Office for Pakenham

SUMMARY

1. The statement as drafted will go down badly here. Irish America has discounted an apology and wants a review.
2. The line that this is all now too far in the past will not convince. How do we square ruling out a review with appointing lawyers to examine the new evidence?

DETAIL

3. I share Veronica Sutherland's concerns about the Bloody Sunday statement as presently drafted. Irish America - especially the Hill lobby - expect us to go beyond an apology. Ruling out a review would go down badly.
4. There are serious problems with the draft statement. In particular:

- the awkward juxtaposition of its two main elements, first ruling out a review and then acknowledging that the Irish government

PS/SofSNI
PS/Adam Ingram
PS/Paul Murphy
PS/PUS
PS/ Mr. Semple
PS/Mr. Steele
Mr. Watkins
Mr. Wood
Mr. Leach
Mr. Bell

Mr. Perry
Mr. MacCabe
Liaison x 2
RUC
Rec'd. 16.12.97



W. Condon 17.12
Excellent prints.
BB
6.12

Mr. MacCabe 21/12

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have passed us "serious new allegations" which are being investigated by senior lawyers. The unequivocal wording of the first will obliterate any good effect of the second. In the absence of the findings of these "senior lawyers", on what basis do we definitively rule out an enquiry?

- the argument that "too much time has passed for us to be able to be sure the whole truth could be found" sits awkwardly with the recent conference on Nazi Gold. Many of the key players from Bloody Sunday are still alive. The statement acknowledges that Widgery "clearly did not convince everybody..." Even if we cannot be sure that a new enquiry would unearth the "whole truth", we would be pilloried for ruling one out before the senior lawyers have completed their investigation.

5. Can we not make more of this investigation? The headline should be that the Government has decided vigorously to pursue the new allegations, not that it has ruled out an enquiry. We would have to explain why it has taken us so long to look into the allegations - but we have to face that question in any case.

6. If the senior lawyers uphold Widgery, we are much better placed to refuse a review. If they do not, we have a problem. But the problem is even greater if we have already ruled out a review.

7. Whatever is decided, it is essential that we get sufficient notice of the timing of any statement, and a final text, to give us a chance to prepare the ground here.

MEYER

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