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John
15/6. BIF
18/6. John 12/6.
cc EO
JH

Note:

The attached document was mistakenly not circulated to those listed at the end of Martin Howard's letter dated 16th May 1996 to Paul Cohen.

I would be grateful for comments by close of play 31 May 96. I apologise for any inconvenience that this may cause.

Peter Philip
Secretary of State's Private Office
Tel. 210 6464

29 May 1996.

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

Paul Cohen Esq
Principal Private Secretary
Privy Council Office
68 Whitehall
London
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11 May 1996

*Dear Paul,***NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE**

You will have seen John Holmes' letter of 26 March to me, copied to your office, indicating that the Prime Minister was content that members of Cabinet be approached about the Secretary of State's proposals for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee (NIGC).

The proposals that my Secretary of State has in mind to put to the Northern Ireland parties are measures which would bring the Northern Ireland Committee broadly into line with its Scottish equivalent. These can be summarised as follows:

- i) Northern Ireland Office Ministers making a PES statement to the NIGC in place of the present briefing arrangements;
- ii) Northern Ireland Ministers making statements and taking questions in Committee on a regular basis;
- iii) other members of Cabinet and other departmental Ministers making statements and taking questions before the Committee;

- iv) holding some NIGC meetings in a Northern Ireland venue;
- v) promoting greater use of the existing power to hold both general debates and to consider Proposals for Draft Orders in Council; and
- vi) providing additional powers to take evidence on draft legislation.

The item at (iii) could affect all members of the Cabinet and their Ministers and we acknowledge the additional burden it would create particularly if it was agreed that some meetings should be held in Northern Ireland. Indeed, meetings in a Northern Ireland venue will also have consequences for House business, especially as up to 25 members of the Committee are from GB constituencies, but hopefully these problems should not be insurmountable.

Proposals on these lines would of course depend to some extent on whether the forthcoming talks lead, as we hope, to a significant measure of legislative devolution for Northern Ireland. In such circumstances certain of the proposals would fall or need to be adapted.

When we have agreement on the way forward in respect of these proposals we shall consider how to approach the Northern Ireland parties. Some of them may be politically contentious in Northern Ireland so we may need to adjust them in the light of any discussions. However, the issues

From: JOHN HOLMES
Date: 16 June 1996

are likely to be raised as part of the forthcoming talks process, which is another reason for wanting to establish a common position. We will keep colleagues informed of developments. I have asked my officials to take forward separately the question of any costs that may be involved.

My Secretary of State would be grateful for comments by 24 May from the Lord President and from those to whom this letter is copied.

Copies go to the Private Secretaries of all Members of Cabinet and to Murdo McLean, (Chief Whips Office), Jane Hope (Lord Privy Seal), Mary Ollard (House of Lords), Alan Sandall and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours

Martin

MARTIN HOWARD

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