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096/06/C



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

25 JUN 1996

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Dear Paddy,

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NI ARMS DECOMMISSIONING BILL: GB DIMENSION

Your Private Secretary wrote to mine on 20 June with the results of your further consideration of the question of how the decommissioning of terrorist weapons in Great Britain (GB) might be handled.

My purpose in raising the matter was to be sure that, when the Decommissioning Bill comes before Parliament, there is a convincing answer to the questions which seem bound to be raised about GB coverage. Although the Manchester bomb presumably makes it less likely that you will want to bring forward legislation before the recess (a point to which I will return below), it and the other mainland atrocities are bound to concentrate Parliamentary attention on the extent to which weapons are currently held in GB; and the value of a decommissioning scheme which does not extend to the mainland may well be questioned.

That said, I would certainly not wish to challenge your assessment, with other colleagues, that it will not be feasible to cover this in the Bill now being prepared, and am content with the course proposed. I would note only that, given the views you attribute to the English Law Officers, the chances of a non-statutory solution in GB seem slight; and, from the business management standpoint, I would for obvious reasons prefer one Bill to two.

That brings me to the question of whether the current Bill is still required before the summer recess. I understand that you are reflecting on this. I am bound to say that we are reaching the point at which it would already be difficult to take a Bill through in the weeks which remain before the House rises. We have recently had to add two new Bills to the programme, so there is pressure on time, particularly in the Lords. I should be grateful to know as soon as possible how you now see this.

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I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Michael Howard, Robert Cranborne, Michael Forsyth, Alastair Goodlad, Nicholas Lyell, Thomas Strathclyde and Donald Mackay, and to Sir Robin Butler and First Parliamentary Counsel.

TONY NEWTON

The Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP
Secretary of State
Northern Ireland Office

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