



*A note to
clear up any
fuzzy + Michael
3.9.*

*File
16/1x.*

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

Prime Minister

*This will strike you as rather
odd - but it is in fact the officials
version of what might be offered
to the US politically in the
Queen's Speech. 2 September 1996*

*No ministers
cannot tell their officials the
real game, for obvious reasons.
Still not much here apart
from the Grand Committee.
How would you like
to handle this,
now?*

Dear John

POSSIBLE INCENTIVES FOR UNIONISTS

In his minute on "The Talks Process - Challenges and Prospects" sent to the Prime Minister today, my Secretary of State referred to a paper on possible measures to meet areas of unionist concern.

I now attach this paper. As you will see, it concludes that, while these measures may be worth pursuing on their merits, they are unlikely to be of short-term value in smoothing the handling of decommissioning in the Talks.

Signed

W K LINDSAY

POSSIBLE INCENTIVES FOR UNIONISTS

Paper by the Northern Ireland Office

1. Considerable judgement is required in identifying initiatives which might induce unionists to show more imagination and flexibility in the Talks process, but would not have a correspondingly negative impact on nationalists which would cancel out any benefits. Two possibilities might be a warmer formulation of the Government's attitude to the Union, and a wider role and remit for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee (NIGC).

2. On the formula on the Union, the fundamental cause of unionist insecurity and lack of confidence is the inherent fear for the future of the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. This, and indeed rising nationalist expectations, are to some extent fed by perceived demographic change. No complete remedy is available, given the formal and longstanding commitments of successive governments to facilitate a united Ireland if most of the people of Northern Ireland show that they want it.

3. It could help considerably if, in addition to the constitutional guarantee, unionists were given a greater sense of the Government's warmth towards Northern Ireland's inclusion in the Union. This would be consistent with our wider policy objectives on constitutional issues. But it is of course important that this should be done in terms consistent with our existing commitments, for example in the 1985 Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration, and the Frameworks for the Future.

4. The Prime Minister might, for example, envisage saying something on these lines:

"Northern Ireland is in the United Kingdom because that is what most of its people want. We warmly welcome that, together with the strength which Northern Ireland's continued membership of the Union contributes to all its constituent parts. At the same time we gladly accept the corresponding challenge posed to us, and indeed to everyone in that pro-Union majority, to work to create in Northern Ireland that framework of mutual respect, consent, justice and equity needed for nationalists, also, to feel that the Union holds out a welcome to them and accords them a worthy and proper place. We will work to achieve an accommodation based on these principles. If we succeed, then, without prejudice to nationalist aspirations, all may come to share something of our warmth for the Union, and in particular its capacity to embrace and profit from diversity."

5. Another option (which has been used before and might provide a little more latitude) would be for Ministers to express their personal warmth about the Union. This is a good deal less influential.

6. The Ulster Unionists have pressed for an expansion of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, on the analogy of the changes to the Scottish Grand Committee (and to a lesser extent the Welsh Grand Committee) during the last 12 months, although they have never been precise about the changes they would wish to see. They have expressed a preference for

✓
John
7 lines drafted
This for app
Conference Speech
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Ministers to put proposals to the parties on the role of the Committee, and the Government has given a commitment to take the issue forward with the parties "at a convenient opportunity".

7. Proposals to bring the NIGC into line with the Scottish equivalent have been broadly agreed in Cabinet correspondence. These include:

- i) Northern Ireland Office Ministers might make a PES statement to the Grand Committee in place of the present briefing arrangements; ✓
- ii) Northern Ireland Ministers might make statements and take questions in Committee on a regular basis; ✓
- iii) Other members of Cabinet and other Departmental Ministers whose responsibilities extend to Northern Ireland might make statements and take questions before the Committee; ✓
- iv) Some Grand Committee meetings might be held in a Northern Ireland venue; ✓
- v) Greater use might be made of the existing power to hold both general debates and those intended to consider proposals for draft Orders in Council; and ✓
- vi) Additional powers might be provided for the Committee to take evidence on draft legislation. ✓

8. These proposals are likely to prompt objections from the SDLP (although it might be possible to assuage these).

Conversely, their implementation would be warmly welcomed by Ulster Unionists and seen as a distinct success, since:

are not feasible at this late stage in the Parliament.

i) They initiated the request, and the changes can be perceived as a strengthening of the links with Westminster;

ii) The new arrangements would give Northern Ireland MPs increased access to Government Ministers and to details of policy;

2 September 1990

iii) They would help keep the political spotlight on Westminster MPs and away from the smaller fringe parties not represented at Westminster.

9. It is clearly sensible to pursue the NIGC proposals on their merits, and further advice will be offered on timing. However, in view of the need for consultation with the parties before any commitment to move ahead could be given, this cannot be seen as an immediate measure; and, although welcome to Unionists, it is unlikely that an enhanced role for the NIGC would in reality read across to a more relaxed approach to decommissioning.

10. Other devices to increase local input to the government of the Province, not necessarily focused on Westminster, could also be devised. Sir J Molyneux MP has been suggesting for some time an Economic Council comprising the Northern Ireland MPs (though this would run the risk of duplicating existing Committees). A perhaps more promising alternative would be a body of local political leaders who could come together as required to advise Ministers on particular issues. This idea might be particularly worth

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pursuing, to help fill the democratic deficit, in the event that the Talks broke down, but more radical possibilities are not feasible at this late stage in the Parliament. Again, however, this is unlikely to be a practical measure to smooth the short-term handling of decommissioning.

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