

From: JOHN HOLMES

Date: 24 September 1996

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH IRISH JOURNALISTS, 1800

Thirty minutes are currently allocated for this but it will be very difficult to stick to. There are 14 well-respected senior Irish journalists, and you will not want to rush them too much. The event paid dividends last year. This year's team are even more heavyweight.

The three main issues are likely to be Northern Ireland, Europe (Irish Presidency) and BSE. But there are a number of smaller possibilities: bilateral relations with the Irish/your relations with the Taoiseach; prisoners; Sellafield; RTE TV reception in Northern Ireland(!).

Doorsteps of briefing have arrived from the FCO and NIO. I have ditched most of it as you will never have time to wade through it. You can busk nearly all of it without difficulty, but I attach, flagged up:

- an introductory speaking note on Northern Ireland and Europe, which you might start with before questions;
- notes on a few non-mainstream NI issues;
- a note on BSE in NI;

- notes on bilateral and nuclear issues;
- a list of the journalists attending.

The journalists are here on a sponsored visit to cover the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body Conference in Bath earlier this week. Paddy Mayhew is giving a speech to them tomorrow morning. I have a copy of the draft if you want to have a look - there are no surprises. He will cover Drumcree in some detail. I think you know the lines on this pretty well.


JOHN HOLMES

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