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See letter out
R. G.
JH 23/2.

From: John Holmes

Date: 13 February 1997

COPY

Proposals attached
to this and
five copy

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

You wanted to know where things stand before you see Paddy Mayhew later this morning.

After your Conference speech, Paddy Mayhew wrote to the Northern Ireland parties and the Opposition with a list of proposed changes (attached), and asked for views. Only the UUP and UKUP replied substantively. The UUP welcomed the proposed changes but wanted change to go much further in two respects:

- Remove
- eliminate.*
- Big Fish.*
- (i) change to the membership of the Committee to reduce radically the number of non N.I. members (there are currently 25);
 - (ii) proposals for handling legislation, e.g. taking N.I. bills in the Committee rather than on the floor of the House, and taking Draft Orders in Council as if they were Bills.

Paddy Mayhew has resisted (i) on the grounds that, although it would be in line with the Scottish and Welsh Committees, such a change would in effect remove Government control of a potentially hostile Committee; and has resisted (ii) on the grounds that such changes would go well beyond what was proposed for Scotland and Wales, would prejudice the Government's whole Northern Ireland political strategy, and would in any case be unacceptable to the Nationalists.

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He was supported in his views by the Lord President and the Chief Whip, and has since been taking consultation forward on this basis, but without much success so far with the SDLP. Since consensus on changes looks increasingly unlikely, we may have to go ahead anyway, in the first place by publishing draft Orders in Council needed to change the Grand Committee. The Lord President and Chief Whip, urged on by me, have been pressing this on Paddy.

**John Holmes**

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