

CONFIDENTIAL

From: John Holmes
Date: 5 March 1997

PRIME MINISTER

NI COMMITTEE

You are familiar with the background, and there is a sound brief from the Cabinet Office.

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

The key issue is whether to include in the answer to Adams' Question 2 the "gratuitous" bit in brackets about admitting Sinn Fein to the resumed talks in June if they do the right thing now about a ceasefire. I cannot imagine this idea will find favour with NI. Cranborne will certainly speak against it. Indeed he is inclined to regard the whole NIO approach as akin to appeasement, although he will not say so.

() There is no mention in the papers of the idea you discussed with Paddy Mayhew and Michael Ancram of being prepared to go further about Sinn Fein's participation if we are asked a more specific follow-up question. It would be easier presentationally to be responding to a specific question rather than appearing to go out of our way to run after Sinn Fein. And waiting for a follow-up question also buys us more time. You may want to float this possibility, depending on how discussion goes.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

Another issue not covered in the paper is briefing Trimble. He must clearly be brought into the picture before Adams' questions are answered, even if the first round of answers is going to be uncontroversial. Paddy Mayhew must be tasked to do this. (Trimble will incidentally be going to Washington late next week, together with other Northern Ireland politicians, for the St Patrick's Day celebrations.) //

Finally, NI will need to decide on exactly how to publicise our answers. I think a press article is the right vehicle. Personally I would like to take the core of the previous article we had on the stocks about the futility of IRA violence and add in bits of language taken from the questions. This could then go out in your name, or perhaps Paddy Mayhew's, in the middle of next week.

**JOHN HOLMES****CONFIDENTIAL**