



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

5 September 1997

Dear Richard,

NORTHERN IRELAND: CONSENT AND DECOMMISSIONING

I should record the latest turns in this saga. The Irish reaction this morning to the language we sent them last night was (inexplicably) fierce: Teahon claimed we had ignored what they had said and left our original wording virtually unchanged. The Taoiseach was extremely disappointed. However, they were prepared to move some way in our direction, and were looking at new language. The Taoiseach would be discussing it with his closest colleagues.

Subsequently, Paddy Teahon rang again to say that, having pored over the language again, the Taoiseach had in the end decided not to send us the language they had been looking at, but to work with our text and make as few changes to it as possible. He would like a quick word with the Prime Minister, after which they would send us the text.

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach then spoke briefly on the telephone. The Taoiseach said that he had spent most of the day working on this problem. Some parts of the text we had sent overnight had driven him wild but, rather than starting again, he had decided in the end to work on the basis of what we had sent. On consent, our language had reverted to that used in 1949 rather than in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But this could be made acceptable by minimal changes. On decommissioning, he accepted what the Prime Minister had said about not trying to create obstacles, and was prepared on this basis to stick closely to our wording. But he needed to be sure that this wording would only be used if Trimble came on board. There was of course a danger that Trimble would pocket what he was offered and ask for more.

The Prime Minister confirmed the Taoiseach's understanding. He would probably tell Trimble that he had not secured the Taoiseach's agreement to language. Ahern then read out some of the changes the Irish had made, on both consent and decommissioning. He repeated that he had tried to stick as closely as

- 2 -

possible to what we had proposed. The Prime Minister said that, on the basis of what the Taoiseach had read out, the language sounded alright, but he would obviously want our experts to go through it.

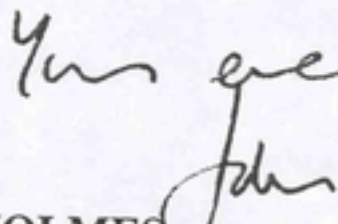
The Prime Minister raised the question of Chairmanships, since Teahon had raised this with me in advance of the call, saying that Mitchell was upset at the idea that he might in some way be seen as de Chastelain's deputy. Ahern said that they had heard that Mitchell was causing difficulties. But if we could get Mitchell on side for what was proposed, the Irish side were relaxed.

The Irish subsequently faxed to us the attached language. Ahern seems to have been as good as his word: the wording is very close to what we sent. But I would be grateful if the experts could nevertheless crawl through it. We need to know in particular how Trimble is likely to react to the penultimate sentence, not least references to decommissioning of "some" paramilitary arms, and the parallelism with progress in the talks, although these were of course in our latest draft.

Meanwhile, as you know, Trimble has written again to the Prime Minister (copy attached). The letter illustrates how difficult it will be to get him on board. But the Prime Minister remains determined to make every effort. We are trying to arrange a meeting with Trimble on Wednesday, 10 September, at which the Prime Minister will seek to persuade Trimble that he must stay in. To achieve this he will need to be fully armed with arguments on all the points raised in Trimble's letter.

As far as chairmanships are concerned, I think it would be helpful if your Minister could talk through the "fudge" idea with Mitchell, in order to get him on board. The sooner this can be done, the better.

I am copying this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and by fax to Sir John Kerr in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin.


JOHN HOLMES

Richard Lemon Esq
Northern Ireland Office