

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
11 MILLBANK
LONDON
SW1P 4QE

Philip Jones
John Holmes Esq
PS/Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London

cc: JEH on

31 July 1997

AR (T) and attach incoming letter.

Dear John,

*Philip
5/8*

Cedric Wilson, Chairman of Standing Committee A (Public Order Issues) of the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue, has written to ask for a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the report produced by that committee on the parades issue. He criticises the Secretary of State and the Minister for refusing to meet the "democratically elected" committee. If the Secretary of State continues to refuse to meet them, he states, "her position as Secretary of State will become untenable."

In her letter of 2 July to John Gorman, Chairman of the Forum, the Secretary of State expressed the her surprise that the Chairman had found it possible to conclude, as required by rule 13 (1) of the Forum's rules of procedure, that the report "might reasonably be deemed to command support across the various traditions in Northern Ireland." The report has been publicly criticised as being one-sided, favouring the marching orders' perspective on parades.

In view of this, it was felt that a meeting between either the Minister or the Secretary of State and the committee would not be prudent or necessary and replies to Mr Wilson's requests for meetings have indicated this. Although this course of action was deemed likely to offend Unionist parties in the Forum, the alternative was to be more offensive to other parties. A meeting with the PM would not,

Ltrs J Holmes



therefore, be appropriate and you have indicated that it is unlikely that he would wish to meet a delegation of this committee.

However, the Secretary of State met Mr Gorman on 28 July and promised to respond to the report in full when the Government's proposed legislation on parades has advanced. Therefore, the draft reply for Private Secretary signature thanks Mr Wilson for his letter, declines a meeting, notes his comments and promises a written response to the recommendations of the report produced by this committee from the Secretary of State when work on the legislation has advanced.

Yours ever
J. M. Lindsay
pp W K LINDSAY