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97x.***From: John Holmes**  
**Date: 3 October 1997****S 92 /97****PRIME MINISTER****cc: Jonathan Powell****NORTHERN IRELAND**

Not a great deal has happened during the past week. The first meeting of the Business Committee of the Talks on Tuesday passed off well, in the sense that everybody was there (except Paisley and McCartney), and the atmosphere was businesslike with no histrionics from either side. The Talks proper, in the Three Strands, are due to start next Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Trimble has been under pressure both from Paisley and McCartney, who held a big rally in Belfast on Monday night against any dealings with Sinn Fein, and from within his own parliamentary party. He seems to be standing up to it reasonably well so far, but his position is fragile. You no doubt bumped into him in Brighton. His pessimistic line on a settlement at the fringe meeting there is not necessarily his real view. There are continuing signs that he and Donaldson at least are ready to do a deal.

On the Republican side, I have put in a separate box reports showing the continuing divisions there. There is likely to be a meeting of the General Army Council in the next week, but it now looks increasingly clear that Adams and McGuinness, and their strategy, will not be overturned.

Mo's remarks at Brighton about ending internment went down predictably badly with the Unionists. This was not what she needed, given her existing relationship

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with them. On the substance, although we are most unlikely to want to use internment in any foreseeable circumstances, I do not see much advantage in taking it off the statute book. It is noteworthy that the Irish retain the legal option for internment – they argue that there may be a case for internment of fringe Republican hard-liners after a settlement.

The next step is your meeting with Trimble on Wednesday to discuss the substance of the Talks, and the shape of a possible settlement. You will need to be well briefed for this – I will put the necessary material in your box on Tuesday night.

Thereafter, we are continuing to plan on a visit by you to Northern Ireland on Monday 13 October, to show your continuing personal interest. The outline I have discussed with the NIO is for you to spend most of the day there, visiting Londonderry, Portadown, Belfast and another Protestant town. In the morning, you would open a major new investment in Londonderry, and see John Hume. In Portadown you would see Trimble. You could make a short speech at lunchtime in Belfast, essentially to call for the talks to get down to business. During a visit to West Belfast in the afternoon, you would meet Gerry Adams. You would see Paisley later in the afternoon, and perhaps Alderdice if that could be fitted in. The visit could end with a walkabout somewhere.

The key element here is obviously meeting Adams. The thinking is that if you meet each of the leaders on their home ground, relatively briefly, you can get over this hurdle in a relatively natural way, without having to have a great political discussion in the Talks context. This would save Gerry Adams'

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appearance in Downing Street for a later occasion, but also make it a little easier when it happens.

You might wish to discuss this on the way back from Moscow.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JH' or 'John'.

**JOHN HOLMES**

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