

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
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*Seen by fax,
and letter signed,*

19 September 1997

JH
23/9.

Dear John,

NORTHERN IRELAND: CONSENT

As you are well aware, the issue of consent in all its various guises is of very great significance in different ways to all the parties involved in the Northern Ireland talks.

For some reason which is not entirely clear, Gary McMichael of the UDP has for some time been seeking a formal reaffirmation, preferably by the talks participants as a whole, that the outcome of the negotiations will be validated solely by reference to the wishes of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. He has been sounding increasingly desperate: he may be under real pressure from Loyalist hardliners to secure clear commitments in this area before the UDP can proceed into substantive negotiations alongside Sinn Féin.

The position he would like the Government to adopt is illogical, even from a Loyalist perspective, because any agreed outcome from the talks is certain to involve developments which would need to be endorsed by the people of the Republic before they could be implemented. More significantly, any attempt to formulate a statement on this set of issues which all participants could

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endorse at this juncture has so far proved impossible: the Irish Government and SDLP have a relatively broad definition of "consent" which would require them to seek a number of balancing clauses to go with any formula likely to be acceptable to the UDP; and Sinn Féin are highly resistant to any attempt to require them to sign up to the principle of consent at the outset of the negotiations. They are currently insisting that any clause on "consent" in the draft procedural motion should be balanced by one in "Republican" language, which is complicating the process of finalising the draft.

At a meeting with Paul Murphy on 16 September, McMichael finally accepted that the only way of securing a statement of the kind he needs was in the form of a letter from the Government. We have shown him the attached draft which he says will fit the bill, but he said it would be very helpful to him if it could issue over the Prime Minister's signature.

Obviously it would be desirable to give McMichael the strongest possible basis for continuing to argue for UDP participation in the negotiations, especially if by sending him a letter we ease the task of securing an agreed procedural motion. My Secretary of State would therefore be very grateful if the Prime Minister could send a letter to McMichael in the terms of the attached draft (to which the Irish have no objections), to arrive before Wednesday 24 September.

Yours ever,

Ken

W K LINDSAY