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FAXED

Via Comen
17/10 25

From the Private Secretary

16 October 1997

Dear Gen,

NORTHERN IRELAND: CONTACTS WITH IRISH OFFICIALS

As you know, I had lunch with Ted Barrington today. He interrogated me in his usual careful, discreet way. We covered the obvious waterfront of the Belfast visit and progress in the talks. I briefed him in more detail than the Irish have probably had before on the sort of things David Trimble had been telling us about the relationship between Strand II and Strand III. I made clear again that the Prime Minister thought that the key to success in the talks probably lay in getting Strand III right, from a Unionist point of view. Barrington reacted positively to this, although he obviously could not say much specific in response.

We also discussed handling of the Unionists. Barrington was complimentary about the way Trimble had been handled recently. He said that David Andrews had had a private meeting with Trimble earlier in the week. It had not been too bad, but Trimble had not been optimistic about the chances of the talks lasting beyond Christmas. Barrington was not sure how far this was tactical and how far it represented Trimble's real views.

Barrington raised Bloody Sunday and prisoner repatriation in standard terms. I responded similarly. We also discussed the need, which we both saw, to build up the SDLP and play down the influence of Sinn Fein. I mentioned to him the SDLP's concerns about a proposed ban on foreign funding for political parties. Barrington did not think that the SDLP got much from the Republic in practice.

I took the opportunity to make clear to Barrington how much grief we were having to take from Trimble because of the decision to exclude sporting events from the remit of the Parades Commission. He made clear that this was viewed very positively by the Irish Government and the SDLP. It was difficult to

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over-estimate the significance of the GAA in Dublin, and not just because of the Taoiseach's interest.

I have also spoken to Paddy Teahon about the GAA, and about prisoner repatriations, where the Irish continue to worry that the three currently under consideration are being held up for political reasons. I have also spoken to him about Trimble, and Strand II/Strand III. He also responded reasonably positively, while repeating the point that Trimble could not be allowed to pocket anything on Strand III, without agreeing to the necessary on Strand II.

Teahon suggested that the dinner which he has had in mind for some time, to follow up the dinner he hosted for John Chilcot and others earlier in the year, would provide a good opportunity for discussion about this. Paddy would like this to take place with Sir Robin Butler - we may have to wean him away from this, but otherwise it strikes me as a reasonable idea.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Stephen Wright in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin.


JOHN HOLMES

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Northern Ireland Office

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