

FROM: JONATHAN MARGETTS
SECURITY POLICY AND OPERATIONS DIVISION
2 OCTOBER 1996

Mr Coleman - B
CPL

cc: Mr Perry

CABINET: DECOMMISSIONING BILL

We spoke this morning and you asked for a line for the Secretary of State to take at Cabinet tomorrow on the Lord President's paper which shows that the Decommissioning Bill, inter alia, has been recognised as a "Desirable" extra in the Business Programme leading up to the Election.

2. As I said to you we were hoping that the Bill (and its Irish equivalent) would be published in draft shortly and, subject to LG clearance, introduced early in the new Session with the intention of it being enacted before Christmas. This would still be our hope but the realities are that the Unionists are proving difficult on the decommissioning issue and the political process may run into the sand as a consequence. That said, we should keep the slot open in case of miracles: I therefore suggest that the Secretary of State, who is all too aware of this, say something along the lines of:-

- Grateful to the Lord President for recognising the need to include the Decommissioning Bill as a 'desirable' extra.
- This should be on a contingency basis at the moment.
- Still hope - if the Irish agree to do likewise - to publish the Bill in draft for the political parties to see in the next few weeks.

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- But if the Talks falter or reach an impasse over the decommissioning issue, then to legislate for it in the absence of a ceasefire and in the absence of Sinn Fein at the Talks table would place an unnecessary burden on parliamentary time and involve vocal opposition from the Unionist parties.

Mr Hill - B
Mr Gilchrist
Mr Mills

(signed)

CABINET MEETING, 3 OCTOBER

JONATHAN MARGETTS

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legislative programme for the next session is on tomorrow's cabinet meeting.

2. I attach an input on the Northern Ireland Police Bill, whose future has yet to be decided finally by the Secretary of State. I summarises the current position and makes the case for a slot to be kept open in the short-term pending that final decision. The consequence of not making a significant effort is that the slot will be lost and the Bill will go by the wayside by default.

3. Clearly there are differences of view between the policing and political directorates over the inclusion of the Bill. In the interests of harmony, could I ask that any changes of substance in the advice to be put to the Secretary of State on the Police Bill be cleared with Mrs Collins or myself ahead of issue?

Signed:

PETER HAY

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