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From the Principal Private Secretary

4 November 1997

See Gen.

NORTHERN IRELAND: IRISH VIEWS

As you know, I had breakfast with Paddy Teahon and Ted Barrington on 4 November. We ran over the course of the current state of the talks. There were no great surprises from the Irish side. Teahon remains convinced that the deal is there to be done on a relatively simple basis, as long as the UUP will accept a North/South body with real powers. Their big doubt is whether the UUP will accept this at the end of the day, and they continue to fear moving on Strand 3, only to find Trimble pocketing this and offering nothing.

Teahon encouraged us to continue our close contacts with Trimble, not least to ensure that we knew his real thinking and could reassure others that he was looking for a settlement in the area of the feasible. The Irish are continuing to work on links with Trimble themselves, and hope for a meeting with the Taoiseach in due course. Meanwhile the Irish have the same problems as everyone else in seeing how the talks are to be moved on to the real substance. They accept that the real deals will need to be struck outside the talks themselves in some way.

Other points worth recording:

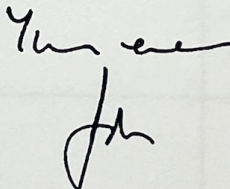
- Teahon was relatively optimistic about the IRA ceasefire, which he described as much more solid than the last one. But he was concerned about defections from PIRA to the CAC, and the possibility of a major CAC atrocity derailing the whole process.
- Sinn Fein had been genuinely angered about the recent move to extradite an ex IRA prisoner doing no harm in the Republic. McGuinness regarded this as an attempt to undermine Sinn Fein. Teahon wondered, on a personal basis, whether we really needed to do these things. Sinn Fein were going to have to perform a major

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u-turn at the end of the day, and the politicians did not need arguments handed to the hardliners.

- Teahon made his usual plea for some movement from us on Loyalist prisoners.
- I pressed on where the Irish were on Articles 2 and 3. Teahon said that Mansergh and the Irish Attorney General were working on this. But he made clear that this would remain difficult for the Irish Government.
- I floated the possibility of Ireland re-joining the Commonwealth at some stage (an idea the Prime Minister is attached to as a means of reassuring Unionist opinion). Teahon and Barrington saw the point, but said that it would be extremely difficult to sell domestically for them, despite the shift of opinion in recent years.

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



JOHN HOLMES

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