

From: John Holmes
Date: 2 February 1998

PRIME MINISTER

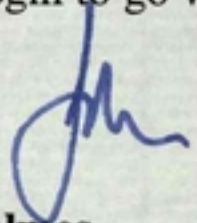
FIREARMS LAW IN NORTHERN IRELAND

You will recall your discussion with Trimble about this, and a subsequent brief talk with Adam Ingram after the Paisley meeting. I attach a note from the NIO about where we stand.

I have looked at the past papers again. We did signal clearly to the NIO in December that you were reluctant to go ahead with the changes they wanted, particularly because of the likely UUP reaction. I fear they did not take our concerns seriously enough, or check with Trimble soon enough – hence the problems Adam ran into last week.

Nevertheless, I think the sort of package he is now proposing, whereby most of the minor administrative reform proposals the NIO want would go ahead to consultation, but the particularly sensitive bits on banning handguns and reviewing Personal Protection weapons would be dropped, is okay. Trimble seems to be happy. As long as this is the case, are you content for the NIO to go ahead on this basis? *if T. happy, yes*

Are you at all worried by the point in the last paragraph of the NIO letter, about the risk of Northern Ireland becoming a refuge for firearms, and therefore inclined to favour an independent review into handgun controls in Northern Ireland? My guess is that the alarming scenario painted by the NIO is unlikely to come about. There may well be a need for a review of N.I. handgun policy at some stage but now is not the moment. If things begin to go wrong, we can reconsider. **Content?** *yes*


John Holmes