

File FFAms-sm
cc EO
J Maslen10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

4 November 1996

Dear Ken,

NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING BILL

The Prime Minister was grateful for Sir Patrick Mayhew's minute of 1 November. He notes that the Departments concerned continue to take the view that it is too difficult to extend the Bill to the rest of the UK. However he remains less than wholly convinced that the difficulties are as great as suggested. Is it really the case that criminals in Great Britain would take advantage of a decommissioning bill to get rid of hot weapons on a large scale? Are the difficulties of redrafting the Bill to include the rest of the UK really so great that there would be a long delay if the Bill were extended?

The Prime Minister has asked the Lord President to chair a meeting of the Ministers most concerned to look at these issues again. If the meeting were to conclude that the Bill really could not be sensibly extended to the rest of the UK, a further look would need to be taken at how the issue would be presented to the Unionists. They would certainly need to be taken through the arguments carefully at an early stage. The lines suggested at present are not convincing. The best argument would presumably be that the Unionists cannot both have an early Bill and one which covers the whole of the UK (despite the Prime Minister's doubts about the reality of this delay).

I am copying this to the Private Secretaries of the Members of NI, Paul Cohen (Lord President's Office), Michael Lugton (Scottish Office), Alan Maxwell (Lord Advocate's Department) and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

JOHN HOLMESKen Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office