



RESTRICTED - POLICY

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Prime Minister's

608/xi

8 November 1996

Dear John

NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING BILL

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of 4 November to Ken Lindsay. This is to confirm that, as I mentioned to you on the telephone, Mr Trimble rang the Home Secretary on 5 November to stress how helpful it would be if the Decommissioning Bill could be extended to the rest of the UK.

The Home Secretary explained that there was a real practical problem over extension. While the majority of illegal weapons in Northern Ireland might be in the hands of people with terrorists purposes, this was not true in England and Wales. Extension therefore would enable a great many criminals to divest themselves of weapons which would otherwise incriminate them. The police would be understandably affronted were that to happen.

Mr Trimble acknowledged the problem. He wondered whether there was any way of avoiding the problem while still allowing for extension. The Home Secretary said that we hadn't been able to think of one yet. But he promised Mr Trimble that if a solution was available he would want to support it. He intimated that discussion was continuing within Government.

Before signing off Mr Trimble floated a suggestion that extension might go ahead on the basis that weapons could be examined forensically but that the evidence resulting would be inadmissible. But Mr Trimble accepted that this probably did not represent a way forward.

I am sending a copy of this letter 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).

Yours sincerely,
Ken Sutton

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