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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

30 March 1998

Dee Hen,

REVISED NORTH-SOUTH AND STRAND I TEXTS

I attach further versions of the two texts deployed with Trimble and Donaldson yesterday, amended to reflect the points made in the discussion. If you are content, we should arrange for the new Strand I text to be given to the SDLP (should it come from here?), and to the UUP again in parallel, still on a strictly confidential basis. Subject to the Prime Minister's agreement, I would also propose to send the new North-South text to Teahon, to form a basis for discussion with the Taoiseach on Wednesday night. Do you see any difficulty with that?

I briefed Teahon this morning on the discussions with Trimble. His main focus was the SDLP insistence on an executive and collective responsibility in Strand I, in order to make North-South arrangements work. We went round this circle in great detail but without reaching any conclusions. His basic view was that all parties taking part in the government of Northern Ireland would have to have signed up fully to the settlement (this was how decommissioning should be dealt with). If a Secretary then refused to accept/abide by whatever was agreed in the Executive/Liaison Committee, he would have to leave his post. An addendum to the d'Hondt formula would need to provide for his place to be taken by someone of a different party but the same persuasion (i.e. the UUP would take over a DUP seat, and the SDLP a Sinn Fein seat). All this would provide the discipline necessary for collective responsibility.

I stressed to Teahon again that, at the end of the day, the structures would only work if the two sides, or at least their main parties, wanted them to work. Building in too many safeguards would not itself achieve this. Teahon agreed but made clear his fear that Paisley and McCartney would make both the Assembly and North-South arrangements unworkable if too much detail/power was left in the hands of the Committees or the Assembly as a whole. Moreover, the

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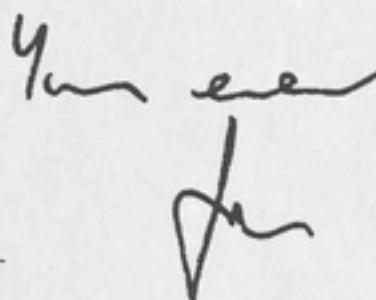
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relationship between the Committees and the Secretaries would have to be clarified now. It was too important to be left till later. I said I hoped the UUP and SDLP could work this out between them.

I suspect this Strand I issue may become the dominant difficulty, closely related as it is to North-South, in the next few days.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN HOLMES

K. Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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