

R 9 12/12

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

WHITEHALL

LONDON SW1A 2AZ



Prime Minister

I confess I had not realised x. In the light of that and Paddy
Mayhew's strong recommendation, content to see the group for

John Holmes Esq 30 minutes - tho' he won't know when?
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON

(downs)¹³/xii

12 December 1996

Dear John,

John/Edward: Why not
on Wed. instead of
something else. Good Good.
T.S.12.

Edward Oakden's letter of 5 December asked for advice on a letter from Ms Monica McWilliams, of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, seeking an early meeting with the Prime Minister. Edward's letter suggests that the Prime Minister would not be able to see the group himself and that we might offer a meeting with an NIO Minister instead.

X You will be aware that having recently seen Robert McCartney's party, the United Kingdom Unionist Party, the Prime Minister has now seen eight of the nine parties participating in the Talks process in Belfast. On this basis it would be taken very ill by them if he declined a meeting with the remaining party, in the form of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

This Coalition was formed in advance of the 30 May elections specifically as a response to the extremely low participation by women in Northern Ireland public life. In view of their lack of an established position, and their cross-community approach, their achievement in securing just over 1% of the votes was rather impressive. They have pursued an entirely constructive line in the Talks, consistently arguing for compromise and early movement towards substantive discussion. They have borne numerous offensive comments from opponents, in particular, the DUP and the UKUP, but they continue to provide a positive contribution as well as reflecting a significantly increasing participation by women.



In light of these considerations, my Secretary of State strongly recommends that the Prime Minister meet with them. The meeting need not be very long, but the Women's Coalition will feel it important to have themselves treated on an equal footing with the other participants in the Talks process.

In a recent discussion with Michael Ancram the Coalition enquired about progress on their request for a meeting, and it is clear that they are looking forward to the occasion. It would be useful if you could agree to this request and for an early meeting to be arranged, though clearly there are considerable diary pressures; we will of course provide the usual briefing once a date is fixed.

Yours ever,

Ken

W K LINDSAY