PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND: NEXT STEPS

Thank you for your personal minute of 21 July.

2. Bill Jeffrey has faxed to Jonathan Powell some lines for Jonathan to take when he meets Gerry Adams later today. We discussed these yesterday evening. But there are a few points I wanted to make in response to your minute.

4. On OTRs, I am thinking in terms of dropping all outstanding extradition requests where the person being sought would be released immediately on return. Gerry Adams can be told this, but I would prefer to delay any announcement until a little later in the summer, to create some space after the release of the remaining prisoners tomorrow. Even
then, we will have to assess the impact on Trimble as the move would create a big stir among Unionists and the media. For the moment my public line will be that I accept that the release of the remaining prisoners has implications for outstanding extradition requests, and that these are being examined.

5. On the treatment of OTRs' sentences, I think it may be possible to devise a scheme which avoids the need for legislation. This would require escapees returning to Northern Ireland to give themselves up to the authorities, but on the understanding that they would be released almost immediately and be able to make a fast track application to the Sentence Review Commissioners for their sentences to be reduced. Officials are still working out the details, and there are awkward angles to be considered like the treatment of offences committed while escaping, in which Gareth Williams has an interest. But it would be good to avoid further controversial legislation on sentences if we could. Sinn Féin would probably reject a purely administrative scheme because of the connotation of surrender, but I don't think we should necessarily let them have the last word. I therefore hope Jonathan won't be too forthcoming about the legislative option.