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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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30 July 1980

[Handwritten signature] 1/8/80
Dear Assistant Secretary

1. I called today on Mr. Michael Alison, MP, Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office who is Deputy to the Secretary of State. Mr. Alison was accompanied by his Private Secretary, Mr. David Brooker, and the Assistant Secretary in charge of police, security and prisons in the NIO, Mr. Paul Buxton. Although I had asked to make a courtesy call in view of my recent arrival here, our meeting in fact lasted for over an hour.
2. I mentioned some of the elements in the recent White Paper which had been welcome to us such as the emphasis on the consent of the minority Community as an essential element for any solution in Northern Ireland. However, some of the reactions to the White Paper during the Commons debate had been quite negative, and I wondered how the British Government now saw the way forward. Alison replied that the reactions to the White Paper had been exactly what they hoped for. They had wished to avoid a high profile for the Paper which might have led to serious attacks upon it, including the ritualistic burning of copies at rallies in the North during the 12th of July period. The low key dismissal of the Paper by the Unionist leaders was exactly what they had been hoping for. A great deal of progress had been made in the past year and the Government's strategy was

to continue to build a consensus patiently, quietly and gently until, like a coral reef, the structure finally emerged above water. Sudden and dramatic initiatives only created alarm in a Northern Ireland context and were counter productive.

3. Mr. Alison pointed out that Mr. Paisley's reaction, even in the House of Commons debate, had not been entirely negative. He believed that Paisley understood the need for guarantees for the minority and that he wanted devolved government in Northern Ireland. He noted that Paisley's recent attacks had focused on peripheral issues, such as the Act of Settlement, and that he had avoided any frontal attack on the concept of participation (or, in other words, power sharing) which was the key to the White Paper. Ministers were quite prepared to be indulgent of these diversionary tactics on Paisley's part.
4. The Government's most immediate task was to see if the Official Unionist Party could be induced to participate in the process. The Official Unionists were confronted with a dilemma in that the White Paper obliged them to choose between integration and devolved government. They hoped, of course, that the failure of the Government's efforts would spare them this choice. Alison said that, in the last resort, the Official Unionists would not opt out and that they would climb on board if a feasible system of devolved government looked like being achieved.
5. Alison said that from his own contacts with people in Northern Ireland, he had the impression that the Protestant population was ready for a return to devolved government in the province. It might be necessary for the UK Government, having brought the

Parties within sight of a consensus, to take the final step of opting for a particular set of arrangements which would be imposed by legislation in the expectation that a receptive climate existed in which the arrangements would work. Alison went on to say that the discussions could become extremely technical and it was possible that the arrangements eventually arrived at would be so complex that the ordinary man in the street would be incapable of making any simple judgements about them.

6. I said that as a result of the process in which the British Government had been engaged for the past twelve months together with such initiatives on the Irish side, as the unprecedented offer by the Taoiseach to consider all options in a conference table situation, an expectation had been created in Dublin that something positive would emerge with which the Irish Government could associate itself. If this did not occur there would be a serious sense of let-down and disappointment. Alison said that the British Government was most appreciative of the degree of cooperation which currently existed, mentioning specifically our positive reaction to the White Paper and cooperation in the security area. He went on to speak of the need for the two Communities in Northern Ireland to have the experience of successfully operating shared political institutions: he saw this as a confidence-building measure which must take place before it would be possible to think of extending this process into a wider Irish framework. If they succeeded, it was quite possible that the Catholic Community in Northern Ireland would tend to distance itself a bit more from the South: this in itself could be a positive development from our point of view in so far as it would tend to reassure the Protestant Community that it would not be isolated in an Irish framework. I said that the problem of

Northern Ireland could not be solved solely in the context of Northern Ireland and that any arrangements for Northern Ireland, if they were to be successful, must accommodate the aspirations and the allegiances of both Communities, as indeed the White Paper recognised. Buxton intervened, at this point, to suggest that this might be accomplished by building on the Taoiseach's ideas in regard to the Anglo-Irish dimension.

7. I enquired about the Government's timetable. Alison said that the Secretary of State had already met the leaders of the main parties and would shortly be meeting with the leader of the Alliance Party. Consultations would continue on a reduced scale during August and would be intensified in September. He said that while no date had been fixed, his guess was that Parliament would reassemble around the 14th October and the Queen's speech would follow within a week to ten days. It was hoped to include some indication of the Government's intentions in the Queen's speech but no bill would be tabled until considerably later, perhaps not until the spring. The Bill would then have to work its way through Parliament so that they were talking, in effect, of a process which could extend over a 6 to 9 month period. The Government, as he had said earlier, were in no hurry and their policy was very much one of festina lente.

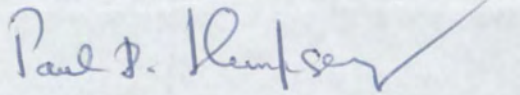
8. I remarked that Mr. Enoch Powell had rallied to the support of the Prime Minister in the debate in the Commons the previous evening on the Labour Party's motion of no confidence in her social and economic policies. We had noted that Mr. Powell had lent conspicuous support to the Prime Minister in the Commons on a number of recent occasions. Alison said that Mr. Powell, no doubt, was glad to find a coincidence between the Prime Minister's economic policies and the views on monetary policy which he himself had held for

many years. Mr. Powell, however, was a subtle man of brilliant intellect and it was quite certain that in supporting the Prime Minister he had ulterior goals in mind. The Prime Minister and Mr. Powell had not been on close terms and there had been very little communication between them in recent times. Alison was sure that Mr. Powell was seeking to get closer to the Prime Minister and that he would wish to influence her views not merely in relation to Northern Ireland but also in regard to the EEC. Mr. Powell was not a party leader and would not, therefore, be involved in the forthcoming consultations with the Secretary of State. But, he could, of course, have a role in the technical discussions at a later stage and he would be heard from when constitutional proposals came before the House of Commons.

9. I brought up the article headed "The Demands of Dublin" by T.E. Utley which appeared in yesterday's Daily Telegraph. While we might not ordinarily be too concerned about attacks appearing in the Telegraph, Mr. Utley's previous association with Mrs. Thatcher was a cause of some slight concern to us. Alison replied categorically that Utley's views were not those of the Prime Minister. While it was true that Utley had helped Mrs. Thatcher with speeches when she was in opposition, this had been in specialist areas and he had not worked with her in relation to Northern Ireland. Furthermore Utley had had no input into No. 10 since the Prime Minister had taken office or he (Alison) would have heard of it. He could assure us that Mrs. Thatcher did not take her opinions from the Telegraph.

10. I brought up the proposals for a meeting in September between the Minister and Mr. Atkins to be followed by the meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister but Alison offered no comment.

Yours sincerely



Paul D. Dempsey
Minister Plenipotentiary

Mr. David Neligan
Assistant Secretary
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