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ANGLO-IRISH CONFERENCE

London, 10 September

POLITICAL MATTERS: SPEAKING POINTS

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON CURRENT SITUATION AND ON PROSPECTS FOR TALKS

- I welcome this opportunity to take stock of where we stand after the summer break.
- It is, I think, particularly valuable to have an informal and wide-ranging discussion of the prospects which we see for a resumption of political dialogue and to exchange views generally on what the Governments need to do over the coming weeks and months.
- The need to make political progress becomes apparent with each passing day. Loyalist sectarian violence is escalating dramatically and the IRA threat is as potent as ever. The dangers of allowing a political vacuum to persist in these circumstances are all too obvious.
- All of us - the political parties as well as the two Governments - have a responsibility to try to end this vacuum and to engender real political movement.
- I would like to see the Unionist leaders taking their leadership responsibilities seriously and showing that they are willing to look for political progress along

with us.

- What is your assessment of present Unionist thinking and of the prospects for a resumption of talks?
- I gather that Michael Ancram has had further contacts with the parties. Have these indicated any developments of interest?
- I have to say that I am not particularly reassured by anything I have heard, either in public or in private, about Unionist attitudes towards a resumption of talks.
- There is a continuing refusal, or at best reluctance, to return to the table unless certain preconditions are met. No talks can succeed if one party tries to conduct an advance negotiation on its preferred agenda. Last year's talks were preceded by the same posturing and in the end, the Unionists sat down with us without their preconditions having been met.
- Let us hope that the same realism will again prevail for any new talks. So far, however, the signs are not encouraging.
- Dr Paisley has extended his list of preconditions for his party's participation. In addition to his earlier demands relating to Articles 2 and 3 and the Hume/Adams talks, he is now again demanding the suspension of the Conference and Secretariat before he will talk. This would suggest that the DUP are not serious about talks at the present time.
- It may well be the case that the UUP have taken comfort from recent developments and that there is now a degree of complacency on their part about talks, as Westminster

appears to have opened up what Mr Molyneux would regard as more promising opportunities.

- Now is the time for Mr Molyneux to demonstrate real leadership and to bring his party back to the table without preconditions. I shall be making that point and I trust that you will be doing likewise.

(If raised by Secretary of State):

- There has been some contact between the McGimpsey brothers and Fergus Finlay. I have, as a result, written to Mr Molyneux to indicate my readiness to meet him.

- I have to say, however, that, from the day I took office, he has been in no doubt about my willingness to see him. This has been conveyed to him through private channels as well as in my public remarks.

- Furthermore, I would not regard a meeting between myself and Mr Molyneux as in any way a substitute for the collective talks process which we have been trying to relaunch.

- I am entirely open to dialogue at any time with him or any other Unionist leader. However, substantive negotiations involving the Irish Government will take place only on the basis of addressing all strands in the relationship. We remain committed to what we all agreed on 26 March 1991.

The rumoured "deal" with the UUP

- The circumstances surrounding the confidence vote last

July have had consequences which cannot be ignored.

- While I accept that the Prime Minister has denied that any "deal" was done with the UUP, the fact remains that there is a widespread belief that the UUP will in due course receive satisfaction on a number of their key objectives. There is a perception that there is a price to be paid for their support.
- Nationalists now have added doubts about the role of the British Government in the context of political talks. You must demonstrate to them that their concerns are unfounded.
- The talks process cannot succeed unless the participants are satisfied that they are taking part in it on equal terms. The SDLP are, of course, ready to take their places at the table immediately - and have been ready since last November. But the prospects for a successful outcome to talks will undoubtedly suffer from any sense that the playing-field has been tipped in the direction of the Unionists from the outset.
- The ingredient of balance is vital for the success of the talks process, or for any successor initiative which we may consider. No progress whatsoever will be achieved unless we can satisfy both traditions that their interests are being catered to in a strictly fair and balanced way.
- Support on your part for a measure such as the establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland would inevitably raise questions about understandings with the Unionists.
- To go down the integrationist road in any form would be

damaging to our joint objective of making political progress. It would send out political signals which would be welcomed by one element within the Unionist community but would be rejected by everyone else.

An integrationist approach, furthermore, would not only fail to attract even minimal consensus but would be a contradiction of the policies of successive British Governments. Last but not least, it would be at variance with the position which you have taken under the Anglo-Irish Agreement which you signed with us.

NEXT STEPS

We have to ask ourselves a number of key questions at this point. The first and most important of these is:

What-kind-of-new-agreement-would-we-wish-to-see?

In this talks process we have an opportunity to aim for a comprehensive settlement of the problem. I cannot exaggerate the importance of grasping this opportunity.

A piecemeal approach which tries to solve one aspect of the problem while ignoring others will not work. An approach which seeks to conciliate one community on terms which disadvantage the other will not work.

We need to strike a balance between nationalist and Unionist interests which is a real and profound balance. If reassurances are given to the Unionist community about their position, these must be matched by reassurances on an equal scale to the nationalist community.

If you try to alter one side of the equation, that

inevitably has consequences for the other. I am not sure that you recognized fully in last year's talks the difficulty of the change which you and the Unionists were proposing, and are still proposing, in the constitutional area. The endorsement of the Unionist position which you are asking us to give could not be contemplated without equivalent constitutional endorsement being extended by you to the nationalist position.

- Our officials have begun to explore the scope for agreement between the two Governments on the elements which might feature in a new agreement. The constitutional issues are the most important of these and also the most difficult.
- Frankly, I do not see how these can be resolved unless there is acceptance on your side of the need for both constitutional positions to receive equal treatment.
- The British Government's role is pivotal. The degree to which we succeed in future talks will depend not on the parties but on the degree to which you are willing to work for a settlement which everyone can live with.
- Without a clear understanding between us on the fundamentals of what we want to achieve, discussion of the institutional aspects of a new agreement will not be very meaningful. If, however, we can reach a consensus on constitutional issues, it may be easier to agree on the kind of institutions which might be built on that foundation.
- I consider it essential that the two Governments agree clearly on a joint purpose for new talks and enter new talks with that purpose firmly in their sights.

- The approach of leaving it to the parties to take the initiative, as you favoured on the last occasion, can never work. Our only chance of success lies in steering the parties gently towards an outcome which we both agree to be desirable.

- Once we agree that that should be the approach to new talks, certain other questions arise:

- Is there a willingness on the part of the Unionist parties at the present time to take part in talks on a new agreement?

- If so, are the parties ready to return to the table on the same basis as before (i.e., 26 March terms)?

- While the 26 March principles are non-negotiable, is there an alternative format with which they would feel more comfortable?

One possibility in this respect would be for the two Governments to work up proposals together which we could then present to the parties for consideration. (This would correspond to some extent to Mr Molyneux's own suggestion for a two-tier structure).

- What are the consequences of proceeding, as you have suggested, with the UUP but without the DUP?

Strengthening of Anglo-Irish Agreement

- I hope very much that some basis for fresh talks can be agreed. This could, however, take some time. Indeed, it is perfectly possible that it will not be achieved at

all.

- In this situation of continuing political uncertainty, it is important that we give clear signals that normal activity under the present Agreement is continuing. We must do all possible to avoid any appearance of a political vacuum.
- The Anglo-Irish Agreement must be seen to be working effectively. Enhanced cooperation between the two Governments would not only discomfit the paramilitaries on both sides but would also be an incentive to those Unionists who are resisting talks to return to the table.
- I would like, accordingly, to look at ways in which we can intensify our efforts to achieve the objectives of the Agreement. I would like to propose that a number of areas of the Agreement which have not received as much attention in recent years as they might have, or which are now acquiring extra relevance and topicality, should be revisited in the form of in-depth discussions at forthcoming Conference meetings.
- I have a number of suggestions in that respect which could be conveyed to you through the Secretariat. These would draw on the review of the work of the Conference which was already carried out by the Joint Secretaries at our request earlier this year.

Other options.

- If it ultimately proves impossible to attract the parties into dialogue, we clearly will have to consider other ways of making political progress.
- While some parties may feel able to stay on the

sidelines, we, as the two sovereign Governments, do not have that luxury. We have a duty to act in order to create a safer future for those whom we represent.

I have made abundantly clear that I wish to engage in dialogue with all the parties and to seek an agreement which enjoys their support. That is the clearly stated policy of the Irish Government.

Indeed, if anything, we attach perhaps greater importance than you do to the DUP being involved in any new talks.

However, it would be wrong for any Government which takes a serious view of its responsibilities to abandon the search for political progress just because one possible avenue has been closed down - and closed down against its will.

Our objective, after all, is to come up with arrangements which will be "acceptable to the people". I hope sincerely that that will come about through political dialogue with all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. And I will do all in my power to achieve that. But I think we should bear in mind that our duty is ultimately to the people, not to the parties as such.

(If raised by the Secretary of State):

The position of the Government on a possible U.S. "peace envoy" has not changed. We have not been responsible for the recent flurry of speculation in the media and elsewhere.

I made clear in an interview last Friday that we have not been progressing this idea and that our priority is to get political talks underway again. The Taoiseach spoke

in similar terms over the weekend.

We have also had meetings with Bruce Morrison and his colleagues, as you have, and we have told them that the Government's position on this issue has not changed.