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Copy No of 8

SECRETARY OF STATE(L&B) BLIS

cc Mr Scott (L&B)BLIS
Mr Bloomfield *25/*
Mr Burns BLIS
PS/PUS(L)BLIS

MEETING WITH MR MOLYNEAUX AND DR PAISLEY

Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley called to see me this morning to discuss conditions at Magilligan Prison. Mr Palmer and Mr McKervill were also present and the latter will be circulating a note on the discussion. After we had dealt with the prisons issue I invited Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley to remain for a private talk, to which they readily agreed.

2. I began by saying that the Government remained anxious to find some way forward from the present political impasse in Northern Ireland. I recalled the meeting which the Prime Minister had held with the Unionist leaders a year ago, following which she had indicated that she was ready to discuss a range of issues, including the handling of Northern Ireland legislation at Westminster. You had repeatedly stated your readiness to meet the Unionist leaders. There had also been an abortive attempt last year to initiate "talks about talks" with officials. I wondered whether Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley thought that the moment might now be opportune to resume a dialogue through any of these channels.

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3. In the light of reports from PAB about what happened at last week's UUP/DUP policy meeting in London, I hoped that this might produce a response that the Unionist leaders were intending to make an approach to the Prime Minister seeking a meeting; but it did not. Instead, I was treated to a lengthy and emphatic statement from Dr Paisley (who did most of the talking throughout the meeting) about the unremitting opposition of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This opposition would not die down, but would be refuelled every time the Intergovernmental Conference met or the British Government in deference to Irish pressure introduced changes in the law on public order etc. The Secretariat at Maryfield was singled out for particular attack. I responded to these points on familiar lines, referring among other things to the recent statement by the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church about opposition to the Agreement; but I do not think that I made any impact on the visitors.

4. Dr Paisley and Mr Molyneaux blamed the failure of last year's talks on the British Government. Picking up my point about possible discussion on legislation, Dr Paisley said that the arrangements for legislation were certainly unsatisfactory and that there had been some discussion with the Whips Office about possible changes; but he thought this was unlikely to come to anything because the Whips were demanding written assurances from him about his future conduct which were quite unacceptable. Mr Molyneaux did not comment on this point, but I thought looked rather uncomfortable.

5. I then tried to draw Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley further by asking their views on the situation which had been created by the Irish General Election. Mr Molyneaux had said that the reason why

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the proposed "talks about talks" had not taken place last year had been that a meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference had been called at the same time. I thought it likely that because of the change of Government in the South there might now be a considerable interval before another meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference was held. Was there any way in which this "pause" might be used to get some sort of dialogue going? Dr Paisley replied with a strong attack on Mr Haughey, referring to the latter's statements opposing Article 1 of the Agreement and saying that he would not support the extradition of Irish citizens unless the British system of justice were reformed. If Mr Haughey decided to take charge of Anglo-Irish relations himself and attended a meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference in Belfast there would be serious disorder. Dr Paisley went on to say that the advent of Mr Haughey had created a new situation which he believed made it necessary for the British Government to review its attitude to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He hoped that in this situation the Prime Minister would be ready to sit down with the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland (by which he appeared to mean the leaders of the Unionist parties) who had not been consulted before the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed to consider a replacement for the Agreement.

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6. In reply to my question about whether the Unionists would want to talk to the Prime Minister only about the Anglo-Irish Agreement or about other subjects like devolution, legislation and ways of making known unionist views, Dr Paisley said emphatically that at the present time he was not interested in talking about devolution but only about the need to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Mr Molyneaux seemed less sure about this. Dr Paisley did not respond to my attempts to discover precisely what he would propose to put in place of the Agreement. I pointed out that the Prime Minister had repeatedly expressed her firm support for the Agreement. It was not yet clear what attitude Mr Haughey would adopt to it, but I thought it unwise for the Unionists to assume that his arrival would lead to the Agreement becoming unworkable.

7. I then asked whether Dr Paisley expected the Prime Minister to invite the unionist leaders to a meeting, or whether they themselves would propose to take the initiative in seeking a meeting. Dr Paisley spoke of the possibility of writing a letter to the Prime Minister; but Mr Molyneaux thought it might be best to make an informal approach first, possibly through Mr Allison, suggesting a short private meeting between the Prime Minister and the two Unionist leaders, possibly at the House of Commons, at which they could

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express their views on the Anglo-Irish Agreement and perhaps leave with the Prime Minister a paper setting out their position in more detail. This might be better than a more formal meeting at No 10, which might result in a confrontation which would become public knowledge and would make further progress impossible. I said that, speaking personally, I thought it would be more prudent to start with an informal contact. If any letter were to be written to the Prime Minister, it might be better to avoid talking about the need to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement (which the Prime Minister could hardly be expected to accept) and simply to seek a general discussion of the current situation.

8. After about an hour, Dr Paisley had to leave for another engagement and I brought the meeting to an end by saying that I would report our conversation to you and that if any approach were to be made to No 10 about a meeting I had no doubt that the Prime Minister would wish to discuss the matter with you. I thanked Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley for this frank exchange and indicated that I would be ready to talk to them again at a later date if they thought this would be helpful. Throughout the conversation they both seemed relaxed and cheerful.

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9. The impression I gained was that the Unionists have not yet decided what to do (which fits in with the PAB report that they are to hold another meeting tomorrow) but that some sort of approach to No 10, seeking a meeting with the Prime Minister, is now likely. If the Unionists stick to the line that the only thing they want to talk about is the replacement of the Agreement any meeting is unlikely to be productive; but I do not think that we should discourage them from seeking to re-open a dialogue, especially if this can be done in the first instance in a discreet way. When we see the precise nature of the approach we shall have to brief the Prime Minister carefully on the line she should take with a view to keeping open the possibility of a continuing dialogue.

10. I attach a draft minute to No 10 reporting the conversation. Alternatively, you may prefer to use this as a speaking note in talking to the Prime Minister.

24 February 1987

ROBERT ANDREW

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DRAFT MINUTE FROM SECRETARY OF STATE TO THE PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley called at Stormont Castle this morning and had a conversation with my Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Robert Andrew. The meeting had been arranged a fortnight ago, with my agreement, to discuss conditions in Magilligan Prison; but after that matter had been dealt with Sir Robert invited Messrs Molyneaux and Paisley to stay on for a private discussion in which he sought to discover whether there was any truth in reports which have been reaching us to the effect that the UUP and DUP leaders may be contemplating seeking another meeting with you.

2. From the conversation which followed it appears that the Unionists have not finally made up their minds what to do (we believe they are holding another meeting among themselves tomorrow); but it seems likely that Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley will either write you a letter seeking a meeting or, as Mr Molyneaux would prefer, make some more informal approach, possibly through Mr Allison. Their objective

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in seeking a meeting would be to emphasise to you the continuing opposition of the majority community in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, as demonstrated by the 400,000 signatures collected for the referendum petition, and to argue that the advent of Mr Haughey has created a new situation since his opposition to Article 1 and his views on extradition have undermined the Agreement. In this situation the Unionists contend that the right thing for you to do would be to sit down with the leaders of the Northern Ireland parties (in the first instance the Unionist parties alone) to consider a replacement for the Agreement.

3. Stated in these bald terms the proposition of the Unionist leaders is clearly unacceptable; but the fact that they are contemplating the resumption of their dialogue with you after a year's delay is, I think, a hopeful sign. If we can get them to a meeting it would at least provide an opportunity for straight talking which would help to dispel Unionist wishful thinking; but it might just be possible to start a process of discussion which could offer a way out of the present impasse, especially if the first meeting could be held without publicity.

4. We must obviously wait until we see the precise terms of any Unionist approach before deciding how to respond; but I thought it might be helpful for you to have this preliminary notice that an approach may be in the offing. We shall be pleased to provide any

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necessary briefing in due course and, naturally, I would hope that if a meeting takes place I might be present.

5. This morning's conversation was on a strictly confidential basis and the whole matter needs to be handled with great discretion. Accordingly, I am copying this minute only to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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