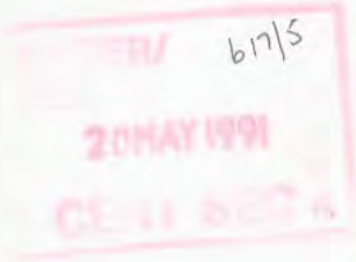


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FROM: PS/Secretary of State
20 May 1991

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Minister of State (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Pilling - B
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Pope o/r - B



Mr D J R Hill (B&L) - B

CONVERSATIONS WITH UNIONIST LEADERS: TUESDAY 14 MAY

I received a telephone call from No 10 at about 6.30 pm, saying that Mr Molyneaux had rung to ask for a meeting with the Prime Minister for himself and Dr Paisley the following day. Mr Molyneaux had said that he would be ringing back at around 7.00 pm. In order to provide advice for No 10, the Secretary of State rang Mr Molyneaux at about 6.50 pm. The Secretary of State said that he was aware that the Unionist leaders had asked to see the Prime Minister the following day. If the Prime Minister were to be able to respond, he would have to reorganise his diary, and it would therefore be helpful to have a word about what was proposed.

2. Mr Molyneaux, who was ringing on Dr Paisley's telephone as his own was out of order, said that they wanted to tell the Prime Minister that they would be content to proceed with the talks on the basis of the papers previously agreed, but that they were not happy with the Secretary of State's latest proposals. Their understanding ever since the Secretary of State's 9 January speech had been that the talks were about a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement and improved internal arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland.

3. The Secretary of State said that while a meeting with the Prime Minister was a matter for him, the Prime Minister would ask for the Secretary of State's advice. In seeing the Prime Minister, it had to be borne in mind that this was a card to be played at the

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optimal moment, and that once played it would not necessarily be available to be played thereafter. Mr Molyneaux responded that he did not envisage a lengthy meeting. As the Prime Minister was involved in talking to Mr Haughey, the Unionists would also wish to put their position to the Prime Minister. They would be giving a positive response to the Prime Minister in the sense that they wish to continue the talks, but on a basis of previous understandings and not that day's document.

4. The Secretary of State said it was important to capitalise on the progress that had been made so far. Were the Unionists saying that they could not carry on with the present schedule of talks, or that they couldn't accept the proposed basis for the talks?

Mr Molyneaux responded the Unionists were being positive, and were prepared to carry on on the basis of the documents of the last fifteen months. Thus they would be able to engage in aspects of the discussions which were not affected by the document issued that day. More generally, the leaders hoped to continue in contact with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, but in a reasonable way. They were not going behind the Secretary of State's back, but the Prime Minister was not subject to the same influences as the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State said he would respond to that remark in a constitutional sense by saying that the government was the government was the government.

5. Mr Molyneaux said that the Unionists were seeking to be positive, and to improve the system for governing Northern Ireland. They would therefore be looking to continue the talks, but in the context of all the previous mutual understandings. The Secretary of State said he interpreted that as wishing to continue on the basis of the principles set out in his statement of 26 March, but not on the basis of the document issued that day. If it were not possible to move forward, it would be better to rest on the document of 26 March, but without going forward from there at present. The other options were to continue with the 26 March document together with either the paper he had issued that day or "a different conduit". As he had to meet the General Synod of the Church of Ireland in 50 minutes, the Secretary of State then suggested that

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further conversation about the meeting with the Prime Minister was conducted in person, and it was agreed that the Unionist leaders would meet the Secretary of State in Parliament Buildings.

6. The Unionist leaders joined the Secretary of State in the latter's office in Parliament Buildings at 7.25 pm. PUS then joined the meeting.

7. Dr Paisley began by complaining about the telephones in the Parliament Building offices, which were always cutting off callers. Neither did he understand why he had three telephones, but Mr Molyneaux only two.

8. The Secretary of State said that he understood that the Unionist leaders wished to talk constructively to the Prime Minister, and in line with agreements mutually reached. Collectively, the process had, he thought, "done some good" to the people in the wider community. If tomorrow the shutters were put up, this would diminish hope, and give a "decent card" to the terrorists as a result of the perception that constitutional politicians could not agree with each other. As he had previously said to Mr Molyneaux on the telephone, No 10 had reported their request for a meeting and asked for advice.

9. Mr Molyneaux said that the Unionist position was that they had built up a very good relationship with the Secretary of State, culminating in a firm and acceptable basis for talks at the end of March. They had therefore decided to enter into real negotiations, and were keen to continue constructive discussions on the basis agreed up to the end of March. However, they had very serious reservations about conducting talks under the document issued that day, large sections of which would be unacceptable to "the people". They did not wish to short-circuit what the Secretary of State was doing, but needed to be sure that the intention was to make better arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland within the UK and that HMG was willing to see a replacement for the Anglo-Irish agreement. On a personal basis, both he and Dr Paisley, after comparing notes, had agreed that they had had a real sense of moving

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in the same direction until that day, when "someone else appeared to be in charge".

10. Dr Paisley said that the Unionists had two options. Either they could walk away, or carry on with the talks. They intended to take the latter course, but would make it clear to the Prime Minister that they would be doing so on the basis of what had previously been agreed and not on the document issued that day. In the Talks the Unionists were prepared to fight their corner for Northern Ireland. They would state their case. They would also listen, provided the discussions were not outside the parameters of Northern Ireland being within the United Kingdom. The arrangements for Strand 1 had become bedevilled by those for Strand 2. If progress was made in Strand 1, there was hope; if there was no progress, there was no hope. If the SDLP adopted a particular line about the South, they would be patient, but once it was proposed that Northern Ireland should be outside the United Kingdom, that "would be it". The Unionists had constructed proposals to put to the conference, which they would do forcefully but courteously. So far as the independent Chairman was concerned, they would "take it as it comes". Mr Molyneaux said that the combination of what the Republicans and the SDLP were saying made it essential that the Unionist leaders paid a reassuring call on the Prime Minister, as this had a stabilising effect on the people whom they represented.

11. The Secretary of State enquired whether the Unionists envisaged carrying on in Strand 1, but only possibly in Strand 2. Dr Paisley said that the Unionists would "play it by ear". It was the Unionists' right to be there. The way the Chairman would handle Strand 2 was to project far into the future. Stage 2 was now a shadow over Stage 1. The Secretary of State asked whether the Unionists would be prepared to conduct Strand 1 in line with the procedure he had outlined. Dr Paisley said it was important to address Phase A of their agenda first. Mr Molyneaux stressed that this was "very important". Dr Paisley said that they accepted that the first day would be a "free for all". If there was something said that the Unionists did not want to stomach, they would leave the room. They would not nit-pick, but neither would they accept

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anything outside the parameters of the internal government of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. They would not have the "failed identity" thesis by Mr Hume. They would leave, wait until he had finished, and then come back. If, on the other hand he was conciliatory, that would be all right.

12. The Secretary of State asked whether the Unionists would agree to the first meeting of Strand 2 being under an independent Chairman. Dr Paisley said they did not agree with it, but they would "go with it". The Secretary of State said the pattern thereafter would be in response to the wishes of the independent Chairman. Dr Paisley said the Unionists would go to the first meeting, however unpalatable, because it would be beneficial for Northern Ireland. He was prepared to face the Irish Government. Mr Molyneaux referred back to an earlier quotation by the Secretary of State to the effect that even if people sung to different hymn sheets, at least the quality of the music could be improved. Dr Paisley said that the paper issued that day had changed the basis of the invitation to the talks.

13. The Secretary of State said that clearly there would not be a plenary meeting the following day. The Prime Minister would probably wish to see the Secretary of State before tomorrow's meeting, and wish him to be present at the meeting. That probably meant a meeting in the afternoon. Dr Paisley commented that there was a need for another meeting to fix the agenda. It was important that Phase A came first. After a "free for all" meeting, he then envisaged bilaterals. The Secretary of State said that he would foresee plenary meetings not taking place until Monday. Meanwhile they would meet the following morning, and could have a conversation on the agenda then.

14. The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.

Signed

A J D PAWSON
Private Secretary

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