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From: PS/Secretary of State
20 May 1991

cc: PS/SofS (B&L) - B
PS/MofS (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Pilling - B
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr McNeill - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Pope, o/r - B

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

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ca Mr [signature]

MEETING WITH THE UNIONIST LEADERS: 14 MAY 1991

The Unionist leaders came to see the Secretary of State in his room in Parliament Buildings at 4.00 pm on Tuesday 14 May. Dr Mawhinney and PUS were also present.

2. Dr Paisley said that the Unionists had "kept their noses to the ground" in London and Dublin. It was clear from the evidence that they had gathered that the document that the Secretary of State had issued earlier in the afternoon had emerged from his meeting with Mr Collins. The Secretary of State acknowledged this, and said that as the Unionists had asked questions about Strands 2 and 3, he had been obliged to consult the Irish Government. He had been engaged in modifying the document since Monday.

3. Dr Paisley said that the Secretary of State's document was an ultimatum. It contained prior conditions at which the Secretary of State had never previously hinted at any time. Dr Paisley noted in particular the reference to close consultation with Irish Government. This was "downright interference" by the Irish Government in Strand 1. The Unionists were prepared to participate in Strand 1 without these issues being settled. It was the Secretary of State who said that they had to be settled as a prior condition to talking. So far as the independent Chairman was concerned, neither his nationality, standing, authority, politics,

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or religion were even indicated. Strand 2 was essentially between the participating parties in Northern Ireland and the Southern Government. Yet the participating parties in the North were not even to be given the opportunity to agree on the independent Chairman. The second paragraph of the Secretary of State's document indicated a new prior condition for talks, and appeared to rule out these taking place on any other basis.

4. Mr Molyneaux said that the issue of the independent Chairman was an important one. The Secretary of State had previously said that the Irish territorial claim was illegal. The Secretary of State corrected him, saying the claim was "unhelpful and had no basis in international law". Mr Molyneaux continued by saying that his point was that if the Secretary of State were chairing the meetings, this would be satisfactory. A neutral Chairman, however, might say that he was neutral, but there was no guarantee that he would in fact be balanced. Dr Paisley said that the Chairman could even invite Mr Haughey to meet the SDLP in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State commented that equally he could not see Mr Haughey meeting in Northern Ireland under his chairmanship.

5. The Secretary of State said that the Government was on record in respect of its position regarding Northern Ireland. In the event of there being a claim made about the legal position of Northern Ireland, HMG would not just "sit on its hands". Dr Paisley said that the location for the second Strand had not been determined. In other words, the prior conditions for talking were not known. The Unionists represented the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, and yet they had been presented an ultimatum by Mr Collins and the SDLP. The Unionists were prepared to meet in London, followed by bilaterals and with the bulk of the exchanges taking place in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State commented that the details would be a matter for the Chairman. Dr Paisley said that the Chairman did not have a stake in the matter. Those who did would be unable to determine whether bilaterals did or did not take place.

6. Dr Paisley then referred to paragraph 6 of the document. He pointed out that this did not make it clear that the Dublin meeting

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would be the final one of Strand 2. Nor did it say that this meeting would also launch Strand 3. In other words the Secretary of State had gone back on his document of the previous Thursday, and had in effect been overruled. The Secretary of State responded that he had previously told the Unionist leaders that because they had put the questions to him, he would need to verify the ground rules for Strand 3.

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7. Mr Molyneaux commented that the overlap between Strands 2 and 3 had been very helpful, as it would involve no loss of face by any of those concerned. To be involved in both the Strands in that overlap was intended to help in a very constructive way without attempting to humiliate anybody. The Secretary of State commented that his document of 26 March made it clear that Strand 3 was between the two governments. What he had sought to do was to find a way in which the input from the parties into Strand 3 would be clearly valued. Mr Molyneaux said that the document made clear that submissions from the parties would be acceptable, whereas the transitional arrangements would have given them a direct voice. Dr Paisley added that paragraph 7 of the document indicated that the parties would have no direct input to the plenary sessions of Strand 3. The Secretary of State acknowledged this, but pointed out that the document specifically provided for Strand 3 to break up to go into Strand 2 mode, in order to pick up Mr Molyneaux's previous wish to comment on UK issues, not just those affecting Northern Ireland. Dr Paisley repeated that there would be no input by the parties to the plenary sessions.

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St 8. The Secretary of State then pointed out that as everything had to be agreed by everyone, there was no question of the governments agreeing something over the heads of the Unionists. The wording of the document was intended to be pragmatic, to enable those parties which were not in Strand 3 to know what was taking place; for himself he was clear that HMG would want to verify what the attitudes of the NI parties were. Dr Paisley commented that this provided little comfort. Dr Mawhinney said that it was not necessarily the case that Strands 1 and 2 would have been disbanded while Strand 3 was in operation. Paragraph 8 made it clear that

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Strands 1 and 2 were still in being, and the statement at the bottom of page one of the document clearly stated that the governments would meet with the parties at the latter's request. Dr Paisley said he was not against the principle of retaining Strands 1 and 2, but the parties would have no say in reconvening these Strands. In Strand 2, it would be the independent Chairman, not even a Government Minister who would choose whether or not to recall Strand 2. The Secretary of State said this was not true of Strand 1. Dr Paisley accepted that. Dr Mawhinney added that someone who was after all voluntarily chairing Strand 2 would allow it to break down on a technical point in not recalling Strand 2 to meet.

9. Dr Paisley said that overall the document was an insult to the majority in Northern Ireland. The Unionists would have to ask for a meeting with the Prime Minister. They would not be ready to give their answer tomorrow as had been requested. Mr Molyneaux interjected that it was "bloody monstrous". Dr Paisley continued that he could see the "long hand" of the Irish Government and the SDLP. The majority in Northern Ireland had been very badly treated. The Unionist leaders were not prepared to "bow to the Dublin Government and the SDLP". The document did not make it clear why the Secretary of State had not persevered with the Unionists' proposal. The very timing of the document went to the very heart of the talks. The leaders would be writing to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of State would then have to reply, and the Unionists would study that reply. But they must see the Prime Minister first, and then reply. The whole future of their country was at stake. He could not see what the rush was. The Unionist leaders were exasperated by having been kept waiting. It was the Secretary of State's turn to be patient. It was necessary to see whether there was a way out. Mr Molyneaux commented that he did not think that there was a way out. Further movement would only be at the expense of the Unionists.

10. The meeting ended at 4.35 pm.

(SIGNED)

A J D PAWSON
PS/Secretary of State

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