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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA



From the Private Secretary

15 May 1991

Dear Tony,

MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND UNIONIST LEADERS

Thank you for your letter of 14 May and for Claire Marson's letter of 15 May containing briefing for the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley which took place this afternoon. Mr. Brooke, Dr. Mawhinney and Mr. Chilcot were present. The substantial part of the meeting lasted for over the full hour. ~~The~~ full meeting (including an interlude while the Unionists went away to work out their press line) lasted 90 minutes. The meeting took place in the Cabinet Room. The atmosphere was friendly.

Mr. Molyneaux opened the meeting by expressing his gratitude to the Prime Minister for seeing him and Dr. Paisley. They were very concerned over the growing influence of the Irish Government over the internal affairs of the United Kingdom. This applied especially to Northern Ireland. But Irish influence could spread to Britain as well, as was clear from reading the London-Irish press. None of the politicians present had had a hand in the Anglo/Irish Agreement. He was not demanding its dramatic repudiation. But he feared the effect of Irish influence on all that Peter Brooke was trying to do. The fiction had been preserved that the influence of Ireland would only apply to non devolved issues but we all knew about what Dr. Paisley had called the long-arm of the Irish Government.

The Prime Minister said that he had earlier indicated that he would be prepared to meet the Unionist Leaders informally and he was happy to have this meeting. All his adult political life had been marked by the renewed troubles in Northern Ireland. We saw every day the evidence of historical disagreements, suspicions and concerns. The violence was unforgivable. He had felt terrorism at first hand in the mortar attack on Downing Street. Its effects were felt in Northern Ireland every day. Whenever we found ourselves in a position of political stalemate with doors being closed, we risked opening doors to terrorism and violence. It was a very high priority to stretch to the limits our tolerance to try to get a statement which would salve this running sore. The problems of Northern Ireland were high on his agenda. They were not a tiresome, optional extra.

The Prime Minister said that he had great admiration for the patience and constructive way in which Mr. Brooke had put together the basis for talks, and for the way in which the Northern Ireland parties had responded. This had been one of the

most hopeful developments for many years. The Prime Minister understood the pressures in Northern Ireland. He could tell the Unionist leaders that as far as the constitutional guarantee was concerned, this was not negotiable. On the Anglo/Irish understanding, there were different strands of opinion. One thing that might emerge from the discussions was a willingness to consider an alternative or replacement to the Anglo/Irish Agreement. But that would only come out of the talks and the opportunity for talks should be grasped and grabbed. The Prime Minister himself would not stand aloof although Peter Brooke would take the lead. The Prime Minister added that he understood the particular concern of the Unionists over an independent chairman for Strand Two of the talks.

Dr. Paisley said that there was no question of pulling down the shutters. The Unionist Leaders would go the second mile in the interests of an agreement. It had always been his understanding that while Dublin would be involved in Strand Two, Strand One stood by itself. However, he had understood the document circulated by Mr. Brooke on 14 May to refer to the three strands and to mean that if parties did not agree to Strands Two and Three on the basis set out, then Strand One would not take place. If the document referred only to the second two legs of the talks then there would not be so much difficulty. As regards location, he had made clear, through a compromise which the Unionists had put forward, that they were not against plenaries in Northern Ireland. He had never set as a pre-condition for talks the abolition of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. He wanted to concentrate on Strand One and go ahead. He was not pulling the shutters down though it was a fact that John Hume of the SDLP wanted to use the Unionists' stand as a pretext for pulling the shutters down on them. No-one had a higher stake in Northern Ireland than himself or Mr. Molyneaux. It was mostly, though not solely, Unionist people who suffered from the IRA. He had been at the home in Armagh yesterday of the IRA's latest victim. He did not agree with the Prime Minister that success in these talks would deal with the violence. That depended on the strong exercise of military force. Political success could create stability which would help, but we were not at a peace conference and the parties doing the fighting were not present. He repeated that if paragraph 2 of Mr. Brooke's paper referred to Strands Two and Three, then he was prepared to talk about it.

Quoting from Conan Doyle ('when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth'), the Prime Minister said that, given that it was unacceptable to some that Mr. Brooke should chair all the talks in Strand Two, and unacceptable to the Unionists that the Irish should chair the talks, then it followed that either there was no chairman, or no talks, or there was an independent chairman. There was no question of using the idea of an independent chairman to internationalise the issue. He hoped that, if asked the question whether Mr. Brooke was a man the Unionists could trust to deal with them fairly, he could reply on their behalf that he was. Strand One was not divorced from Strands Two and Three. But the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would

move to Strand Two. If not enough progress had been made, he would not move on. What would be very difficult would be to start Strand One but to leave unresolved the practical issues relating to Strands Two and Three.

Mr. Brooke said that the March 26 statement was a construction of interacting strands, amounting to a total package. There had been different motivations and interests but the agreement reached represented a balance. The heart of the deal was that nothing was finally agreed in any one strand until everything had been agreed in all the strands as a whole. So Strand One would not be completed until all concerned could see the whole package. There was a purely practical point about the location of the meetings in Strand Two: namely the need to know where the meetings were going to take place.

Dr. Paisley said he would answer the Prime Minister's question even though it was rhetorical. He had gone on record to express his respect for Mr. Brooke but the confidence of the Unionists had been badly shaken by Mr. Brooke's being thrown off what he had said on 8 May by the reaction of the Government of the Republic of Ireland. He accepted that the first strand of talks were not self-contained but they were as far as Northern Ireland representatives and the Secretary of State were concerned. The Irish Government were not to be represented there even though Mr. Hume would no doubt brief them. Dr. Paisley was worried that paragraph 5 of the document referring to the conduct of non-plenary meetings could allow people to troop from the Republic to Northern Ireland. The SDLP were already going round suggesting Jimmy Carter should be the independent chairman. The whole idea of an independent chairman needed to be fully discussed with the Unionists. As regards location, he had made clear that he was happy to have the talks in Northern Ireland but the exact location was not yet known. When that was spelled out, then the Unionists would take a decision. But there was no question of them running away. They had run away from participation in Westminster and local councils in the past, and that had been a mistake.

Mr. Molyneux said he and Dr. Paisley trusted Mr. Brooke absolutely but we had to face the reality of delaying tactics from the Republic of Ireland. That was very demoralising for all of them. Strand One was not entirely self-contained: it represented a practical first step. He alluded to the discussion between himself, Mrs. Thatcher and Airey Neave leading up to the 1979 Conservative Manifesto. Trust and confidence had been built up. Those involved now were walking a high wire and had to see if the wire could be lowered a bit.

Dr. Paisley said that if Strand one talks started it might be possible to get on terms with the SDLP and ease the tension. He had a good personal relationship with John Hume though the latter got very uptight about nationalist issues.

The Prime Minister said that this was clearly a three-pipe problem. If the Unionists were concerned about an independent chairman then there was a failsafe device in that whatever happened on a strand by strand basis could not be implemented

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until all the strands had been completed. Both Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley replied that they feared losing the first strand which was the most important of all.

Dr. Paisley said that the British Government could not be neutral about Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. The British Government had lied to the Northern Ireland parties about the Anglo/Irish Agreement, which was not accepted by the bulk of Unionists. He agreed with the Prime Minister that the aim had to be to get an alternative replacement. The creation of stability had to be the responsibility of the British Government. If there was a sell out then everyone would be in trouble. For his part, Dr. Paisley was prepared to continue with the process. He hoped they would be fully informed about the chairman, standing orders for his work and the location of talks in Northern Ireland. Then the Unionists could give a full response. They would not say this was the end of their participation.

Mr. Molyneaux said that he was reassured that the British Government would stand firm on the issue of not internationalising the chairmanship. The last thing they wanted was some UN figure proposing a compromise on Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. Dr. Paisley said that it had never been his position that the Irish Government should abandon Articles 2 and 3 before talks could take place. He wanted the Articles to be on the table and have Mr. Haughey to listen to alternatives. But Mr. Brooke was not batting with the Unionists on this. He should be saying that it was better if the Republic of Ireland withdrew those Articles. That was the way to deprive the IRA of oxygen.

Mr. Molyneaux added that the Irish claim to Northern Ireland was a shared objective between the Irish Republic and the IRA. They differed only over methods. Removing the claim would also put the so-called Loyalist terrorists out of business. He hoped that the British Government would beef up their attitude to Articles 2 and 3.

The Prime Minister said that as politicians the Unionists would understand the reality. Certain things could not be conceded in advance. HMG had shown its commitment by its determination to get talks agreed. These issues would only emerge from discussions. He hoped the talks could go ahead on the practical basis which Mr. Brooke had set out.

Dr. Paisley said he could not agree to a blank cheque. The Unionists had agreed to the talks in Strand Two taking place in Belfast, London and Dublin. They were prepared to start Strand One and, when the British Government had set out clarifications on the other outstanding issues, they would then express a view. They might not agree to the independent chairman, but might nevertheless accept to sit under him.

The conversation went round this point for a while longer. The concluding position set out by the Unionists was:

- 1) that they welcomed clarification that Mr. Brooke's paper referred only to Strands Two and Three;

- ii) they sought clarification on the location of the talks;
- iii) they wanted consultation on the chairmanship and on the standing arrangements under which he would operate.

The Prime Minister said he interpreted this as an agreement in principle to go ahead. The chairman would clearly have to be acceptable to everyone and the standing orders under which he would operate and the location of talks in Northern Ireland remained to be determined. In principle we should proceed and see how far we got. Mr. Molyneaux said he hoped the British Government would support the Unionists in opposing the Irish territorial claim, albeit not in the same language.

Dr. Paisley said (and repeated the point several times) that he was not agreeing to go ahead on the basis of the 14 May paper in principle, because that implied that he accepted the principle on which Mr. Brooke's paper was put forward. What he was saying was that he was agreeing to "work the document" in practice. Full agreement would depend on agreement on the chairman and on the location of the talks in Northern Ireland. But he was not putting up the shutters. He did not think the issue of location would be very difficult.

There was then a break while the Unionists worked out the statement they would make after the talks, which they then came back and read out to the meeting. Mr. Brooke set out what he would say. He explained that he would describe an agreement as having been reached in principle: he would have to have a basis to explain to the other Northern Ireland parties where the Unionists now stood on the 14 May document. Dr. Paisley appeared to accept this, saying that he was certainly not arguing about semantics. Mr Molyneaux came close to saying in terms that he and Dr Paisley were shifting their ground substantially, but could not be expected to climb down inside twenty-four hours.

I enclose the texts of what the Unionists and Mr. Brooke subsequently said in Downing Street.

I have written separately to John Chilcot about the Prime Minister's message to Mr. Haughey.

I am copying this letter, and enclosures, to Christopher Prentice (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Colin Walters (Home Office), Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence), Juliet Wheldon (Law Officer's Department), Tim Sutton (Lord President's Office) and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

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Steph

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ony Pawson, Esq.,
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QUESTION:

We thought you were the independent chairman, Sir?

MR BROOKE:

We may be collectively at a mild disadvantage that the document may not be precisely in the public domain but the fact that an independent chairman has in fact been proposed, has been known overnight, the document does indicate that there would be an independent chairman for Strand 2 but that independent chairman is obviously still to be appointed on the decision of the two governments after consultation with the parties.

QUESTION:

Are you confident that the inter-party talks will go ahead now?

MR BROOKE:

The situation is that we will conduct it in the manner in which we have conducted it throughout, that provided that everyone is content we move forward, if the other parties are content with that basis, then we have a basis for going forward.

QUESTION:

Surely you must feel though that the Unionists have re-written your agenda and simply ignored your deadline?

MR BROOKE:

Given the fact that they had asked for the clarification relating to the constitutional implications of an independent

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chairman and I having indicated that I thought that that was an appropriate question for them to raise with the Prime Minister and there not being the faintest possibility of them actually being able to see the Prime Minister before 10.00 this morning, we did in fact accommodate that deadline and I so informed the other party leaders.

QUESTION:

Did the Unionist leaders ask for any reassurance and did they get any reassurance about the British Government's attitude to the territorial claim to Northern Ireland?

MR BROOKE:

The Unionist leaders indicated that they would wish to raise that subject under Strand 2 and they would be looking to the British government to express an opinion in that strand.

QUESTION:

Inaudible.

MR BROOKE:

What the Unionist leaders said was that they would seek to work the agreement.

QUESTION:

I think that a lot of people sense that a lot of this process will depend on how the politicians actually related to each other in Strand 1 when they actually met each other, do you not feel that that is now very badly damaged, that there is a lot of distrust

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MR BROOKE:

I do not think the process has obviously helped because we have had the two and a half weeks that we have had. On the other hand I have consistently myself, and I am speaking personally, thought that the location where we conducted Strand 2 was actually going to be a difficult problem and if we had been able as a result of this somewhat protracted discussion to reach agreement then I think in fact the process will have been strengthened as a consequence. Assuming everyone is content, we would not be meeting until Monday and there will therefore be an opportunity perhaps for some of the dust to settle.

QUESTION:

Are you confident that your initiative is now intact and are you optimistic for its outcome?

MR BROOKE:

I have conducted the whole of the last 16 months in terms of possibilities rather than probabilities and given the fact that there are lots of other people involved in this process I would not want to make any certain prediction but we have certainly got a basis for discussion with everybody else.

QUESTION:

... addressed the ultimatums?

MR BROOKE:

No, although the word ultimatum is one which has been

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proceeding on with Strand 1 and taking a full part in the procedures and talks under Strand 1.

In regard to the other matters concerning Strands 2 and 3, we intimated that we needed the matters of an independent chairman and the locations in Northern Ireland fully clarified before we could have a full agreement.

MR MOLYNEUX:

On that matter of the independent chairman we obtained assurances that an independent chairman, whatever his nationality, would not result in international adjudication on for example the Irish territorial claim to Northern Ireland. We hope that you will all be able to come round to the Grand Committee Room and we can perhaps deal with some further questions. Thank you very much.

QUESTION:

Does that mean the process goes ahead?

MR PAISLEY:

Yes, we said on Monday morning we would be there at 10.30.

QUESTION:

And Mr Brooke has accepted that?

MR PAISLEY:

Oh yes, Mr Brooke has accepted that, it is up to the other two parties to say whether they are accepting.

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QUESTION:

Do you think the inter-party talks will take place on Monday then?

MR PAISLEY:

Yes, yes, definitely.

QUESTION:

Did you get any assurance on the Republic's territorial claim to Northern Ireland from the Prime Minister?

MR PAISLEY:

I think you should come, Mr Kelly, round to the House of Commons and ask these questions.

END OF TRANSCRIPT)