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FROM: I M BURNS, DUS(L)
22 May 1990



cc: PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
1. Sir K Bloomfield - B 2. Pol 2 (2/F)
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr J McConnell - B

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) - B

THE AFTERMATH OF TODAY'S MEETING WITH UNIONIST LEADERS

It is most unlikely that in the aftermath of today's meeting with Unionist leaders the Secretary of State will want to leave the field open to Molyneaux and Paisley to give their own interpretation of events. Although this is a tactical decision that cannot be made until the meeting itself is complete, I suspect that whether the meeting marks the continued forward movement of the political process, or whether it marks the stalling of that process, the Secretary of State will want to take a fairly early opportunity of giving to the press his own interpretation of where we are, and why. With that thought in mind, I attach some possible press lines for the more difficult, negative, scenarios. There are five altogether, and to help in judging what the Secretary of State might say to the press I have hazarded a guess as to what Molyneaux and Paisley might themselves intend to say to the press in each of the specified sets of circumstances.

SIGNED:

I M BURNS
22 May 1990
OAB 6447
DUSL/KR/16546

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A. Outcome: Talks break down because Unionists unwilling to commit themselves to interparty talks.

Paisley and Molyneaux: will probably seek to generalise the issues, claiming that Secretary of State unable to meet their conditions; perhaps claiming that they remain open to further discussions.

Secretary of State's line:

In January I gave a very frank account of the prospects for political progress as I saw them, and of the ingredients that seemed likely to be required, and the direction that the elected representatives in Northern Ireland seemed to expect progress to take. Since then I have had a valuable and encouraging round of talks as a result of which I have been able to put to Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley my own suggestion as to how genuine interparty talks might be started. In particular I have been able to suggest to them ways in which they might honourably consider that their commitment to certain preconditions has been met.

However, they have today told me that despite the progress that has been made they are not yet able to assure me, that when action has been taken on their preconditions they will without further ado join me and the other Northern Ireland political parties in interparty talks. Given that the purpose of our discussion has been to find an acceptable way to such talks, I am bound to find this lack of commitment to talks both disappointing and surprising.

I do nevertheless believe that we have collectively made important progress during the last four months. Political progress is never easy in Northern Ireland given the

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difficulties that beset all of us, and I think it more important to recognise the progress that has been made than to pick over the reasons why further movement now seems unlikely in the immediate future. I plan to continue my contacts with the Northern Ireland parties. I say that they have insisted on their manifesto commitment that the working of the Secretariat must be suspended; that the Secretary of State has been unwilling to meet this (very reasonable) precondition; and that the Unionist leaders cannot take talks any further while the Government remains obdurate.

Secretary of State's line:

In January I gave a very frank account of the prospects for political progress as I saw them, and of the ingredients that seemed likely to be required, and the direction that the elected representatives in Northern Ireland seemed to expect progress to take. Since then I have had a valuable and encouraging round of talks as a result of which I have been able to put to Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley my own suggestion as to how genuine interparty talks might be started. In particular I have been able to suggest to them ways in which they might honourably consider that their commitment to certain preconditions has been met.

I have accepted the Unionist leaders argument that while the Conference is not meeting, the Secretariat will not be required to service the Conference; and I have accepted that this has obvious implications for the work of the British and the Irish officials who represent their Governments there. But I have also had to make it plain that the Government, while acknowledging the different circumstances that would apply during any gap in Conference meetings, could not contemplate

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B. Outcome: Unionists will not accept the available compromise on Precondition 3.

Paisley and Molyneaux: will say that they have insisted on their manifesto commitment that the working of the Secretariat must be suspended; that the Secretary of State has been unwilling to meet this (very reasonable) precondition; and that the Unionist leaders cannot take talks any further while the Government remains obdurate.

Secretary of State's line:

In January I gave a very frank account of the prospects for political progress as I saw them, and of the ingredients that seemed likely to be required, and the direction that the elected representatives in Northern Ireland seemed to expect progress to take. Since then I have had a valuable and encouraging round of talks as a result of which I have been able to put to Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley my own suggestion as to how genuine interparty talks might be started. In particular I have been able to suggest to them ways in which they might honourably consider that their commitment to certain preconditions has been met.

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"suspending" the Secretariat, or "closing" Maryfield. The British and Irish Officials in the Secretariat are the interface for essential communications between the two Governments, and Northern Ireland's interests would be badly served if that channel of communication was broken.

In today's discussions we were unable to find a position acceptable to both sides. In particular the Unionist leaders told me of the difficulties they believed would arise if the civil servants representing the two Governments in the Secretariat were to be asked to play a part in the context of the planned talks. I acknowledge the sensitivity of this point, but have to explain that each Government must reserve the right of its Ministers to be supported in this work and in other work by officials of their own choosing. None of this distracts in any way from the fact that for both Governments it is Ministers alone who are responsible for policy decisions.

As I have said, in today's discussion we were unable to find a position acceptable to both sides. I think it best that we should acknowledge this frankly, in the spirit of the discussions we have had. It means that we shall all need to reflect a little further about the way forward.

Meanwhile I believe that we have collectively made important progress during the last four months. Political progress is never easy in Northern Ireland given the difficulties that beset all of us, and I think it more important to recognise the progress that has been made than to pick over the reasons why further movement now seems unlikely in the immediate future. I plan to continue my contacts with the Northern Ireland parties.

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Indeed the question of Northern Ireland's relationship with the
 C. Outcome: Talks breakdown over the Irish dimension depends by the unionist parties themselves, by their wish to
Paisley and Molyneaux: Dublin has no role in talks until we have
 made our peace here in Northern Ireland. discussions which
 involve both the Northern Ireland parties and the Government of
Secretary of State's line: There is, I believe, room for debate
 about the most fruitful points at which to embark on the

In January I gave a very frank account of the prospects for political progress as I saw them, and of the ingredients that seemed likely to be required, and the direction that the elected representatives in Northern Ireland seemed to expect progress to take. Since then I have had a valuable and encouraging round of talks as a result of which I have been able to put to Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley my own suggestion as to how genuine interparty talks might be started. In particular I have been able to suggest to them ways in which they might honourably consider that their commitment to certain preconditions has been met. Her movement now seems unlikely in the immediate future. I plan to continue my contacts with the Northern Ireland parties.

We have also discussed the way in which interparty talks would be structured. The Unionist leaders have given me a clear undertaking that when they can see that their preconditions have been met, they will be willing to meet with the other Northern Ireland parties, under my chairmanship, to discuss the relationships in Northern Ireland and ideas for the future government of Northern Ireland. They have also told me that they do not feel able to agree at this stage to [the principle of] talks with the Irish Government. I find this disappointing because, as I said in my speech in Bangor in January "It seems self-evident that discussion about the future government of Northern Ireland would need to embrace both the concept of devolution and the North-South relationship, and it is impossible to ignore the wider relationship between the two islands".

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Indeed the question of Northern Ireland's relationship with the Republic of Ireland has been placed firmly on the political agenda by the unionist parties themselves, by their wish to consider alternatives to the present Anglo-Irish Agreement. And that relationship can only be resolved in discussions which involve both the Northern Ireland parties and the Government of the Republic of Ireland. There is, I believe, room for debate about the most fruitful points at which to embark on the substance of such a discussion, but no room for argument about the principle that such exchanges are needed if Northern Ireland is to be confident of relationship it is to have with its Southern neighbour.

Meanwhile I believe that we have collectively made important progress during the last four months. Political progress is never easy in Northern Ireland given the difficulties that beset all of us, and I think it more important to recognise the progress that has been made than to pick over the reasons why further movement now seems unlikely in the immediate future. I plan to continue my contacts with the Northern Ireland parties.

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D. Outcome: Talks break down over a range of issues, with none being identified as the main stumbling block.

Secretary of State's line:

In January I gave a very frank account of the prospects for political progress as I saw them, and of the ingredients that seemed likely to be required, and the direction that the elected representatives in Northern Ireland seemed to expect progress to take. Since then I have had a valuable and encouraging round of talks as a result of which I have been able to put to Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley my own suggestion as to how genuine interparty talks might be started. In particular I have been able to suggest to them ways in which they might honourably consider that their commitment to certain preconditions has been met.

In today's discussions we were unable to find a position acceptable to both sides. I think it best that we should acknowledge this frankly, in the spirit of the discussions we have had. It means that we shall all need to reflect a little further about the way forward.

I do nevertheless believe that we have collectively made important progress during the last four months. Political progress is never easy in Northern Ireland given the difficulties that beset all of us, and I think it more important to recognise the progress that has been made than to pick over the reasons why further movement now seems unlikely in the immediate future. I plan to continue my contacts with the Northern Ireland parties.

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E. Outcome: An inconclusive discussion - no clear agreement, no breakdown, possibly an agreement to meet again.

Secretary of State's line:

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I believe we have made useful progress on this, and on the arrangements for interparty talks. We have not yet reached full agreement, but I think we are all hopeful that we will be able to do so. Both sides will be reflecting on the discussion we have had [and I expect us to meet again after that.]

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