

CONFIDENTIAL

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND
DR. IAN PAISLEY AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 14 NOVEMBER 1979 AT 2045

Present

The Prime Minister	Dr. Ian Paisley, M.P.
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Mr. Robinson, M.P.
Mr. Ian Gow, M.P.	
Mr. Alexander	

* * * * *

Dr. Paisley said that he had bad news for the Prime Minister. He had just heard that Mr. Molyneaux had said on the radio that the Prime Minister had told him she intended to do nothing more on the security front. Mr. Molyneaux had been through the list of proposals he had put forward in August and claimed that the Prime Minister had rejected all of them (this was what Dr. Paisley said: it may well be that Mr. Molyneaux in fact referred to the proposals listed in the District Council resolution of 16 October). The official Ulster Unionists did not want a Conference and did not want to attend it. They simply wanted to re-organise local government. Turning to his own views, Dr. Paisley said that, as the figures showed, the security situation in Northern Ireland was bad. When he had last met the Prime Minister, in Stormont, he had forecast that the situation would deteriorate. Since then Mr. Neave had been killed. He wondered who would be gone next time he and the Prime Minister met.

Dr. Paisley then noted that Mr. Molyneaux had had a 40 minute meeting with the Prime Minister whereas it seemed that he was to have only 30 minutes. The Prime Minister arranged for her next meeting to be postponed for 15 minutes.

Dr. Paisley said that he represented the most slandered, most abused, most betrayed people in the United Kingdom: the Protestants of Northern Ireland. The vast majority of the people murdered and maimed in Northern Ireland were Protestants, the vast majority of businesses looted or destroyed were Protestant.

CONFIDENTIAL

/These

These were nonetheless the people who filled the ranks of the RUC while Mr. Fitt's Party refused to acknowledge the role of that organisation. Dr. Paisley said that the Prime Minister must make a declaration which would put heart into the Ulster people. This should be a firm declaration that the Government were determined to win rather than simply to hinder or obstruct the IRA.

Dr. Paisley said that two things were required on the security front. The first was a stronger deterrent. The Courts were not handing out sufficiently severe sentences. Mr. Robinson pointed out that between 25% and 35% of those found guilty of terrorist offences left the Court free men because they were given non-custodial sentences. 50% of those found guilty of membership of illegal organisations received similar sentences. About 100 cases in these categories went through the Courts each year. In reply to a question by the Prime Minister the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that there was no shortage of prison accommodation. There was a maximum prison sentence but no minimum. Dr. Paisley said that there was at present no deterrent against membership of an illegal organisation. The finding of such a deterrent was a matter requiring urgent consideration. There should inevitably be a prison sentence for any terrorist offence.

Dr. Paisley said that the second point requiring urgent attention was the removal of the possibility of sanctuary south of the border for terrorists. Mr. Lynch could be pushed on extradition and the Government should keep up the pressure on him. He was vulnerable. The business community in the Republic were up in arms because of the recent spate of bank robberies. There were 500,000 citizens of the Republic in the United Kingdom milking the social services. It should be made plain to Mr. Lynch that we could not go on receiving them with open arms if he was not going to take action on extradition. Moreover, it was essential that the Northern Ireland police should be able to question suspects south of the border. At present they encountered every kind of obstacle. If Mr. Lynch refused to play ball, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic should be closed. The example of Cyprus showed that it would be perfectly feasible to seal the border.

/The Prime Minister

CONFIDENTIAL

The Prime Minister said that the Government were doing everything they could. She had shown her personal commitment by going to Northern Ireland in August. An experienced and influential man had been appointed to improve co-ordination. The police had asked for an extra 1,000 men: they were getting them. Other action was in hand which, for reasons that Dr. Paisley would understand, could not be fully revealed. The Army and the police were pleased with the way things were going. On the question of cross-border security, we had got more than we had ever got before even though it was, of course, less than we would have liked. Her objectives were exactly the same as Dr. Paisley's where security was concerned. Everything possible had to be done to protect the law-abiding. Hence the increased effort being made by the Government to support the police and the Army both in England and in Northern Ireland. But of course the task of the defenders of the law was always more difficult than that of the evil aggressors.

In response to an observation by the Prime Minister that she could not influence the work of the Courts in Northern Ireland, Mr. Robinson said that the Government did have the power to set minimum sentences. The Prime Minister pointed out that one difficulty of having very severe sentences was that there tended to be fewer convictions. Dr. Paisley asked whether the Prime Minister would nonetheless be prepared to look at the matter again. The Prime Minister said that she was not optimistic, but she was always prepared to look at a question again if new facts to justify the review were produced. Mr. Robinson said that it might be a good idea to reduce the discretion available to the Courts. One difficulty was that some Judges in Northern Ireland were sympathetic to those in the dock. The Prime Minister said that she could not be expected to entertain such comments. If Mr. Robinson and Dr. Paisley felt this was true, it would be open to them to make an address to both Houses of Parliament. Dr. Paisley said that this was not the real problem. The question was why people should put their lives at risk to get men into Court and then see the accused leave as free men. The Prime Minister said that if Dr. Paisley would produce the facts she would look at them.

/Dr. Paisley

CONFIDENTIAL

Dr. Paisley referred to the question of relations with the Republic and said that the Prime Minister had admitted that she had failed to get what she wanted from Mr. Lynch. The Prime Minister said that the Government had got more than they had ever achieved before and were profoundly grateful to Mr. Lynch for the efforts he was making. She very much hoped that Dr. Paisley would say nothing that might put co-operation between Britain and the Republic in jeopardy. Dr. Paisley asked again for an assurance that the Government would keep up the pressure. Mr. Lynch had given way in September because of the Mountbatten murders. He was still on the wrong foot and was almost ready to concede the British case on extradition. The Prime Minister asked Dr. Paisley to remember that Mr. Lynch had his own political problems. She would press on extradition when there was a sound and specific case.

The Prime Minister said she intended to maintain the pressure on the security front. But it had also seemed important to her to take a political initiative. It was essential to show the world that the Government were consulting with Ulster about the next steps. She was anxious that the Conference should be successful. Several options would be debated. The object would be to find the greatest area of agreement. The Conference was important not only for domestic reasons but also because of the international reaction, e.g. in the United States. The Government would be criticized if they put forward proposals without consultation. The Conference would not be a last step but a first step. The people in Northern Ireland had fewer opportunities to take decisions on a democratic basis than anyone else in the United Kingdom. There had to be improvement. The question was not whether there should be a move but in what direction it should take place. In response to an observation by Dr. Paisley that no political solution would stop the terrorists, the Prime Minister said that of course the IRA had to be defeated by security measures. The Government had made that commitment and intended to honour it.

Dr. Paisley said that the people of Ulster at present had no confidence in the Government. He wanted to be at the Conference table but the Prime Minister would have to help to get him there. Mr. Molyneaux should also be there. But neither would be present

CONFIDENTIAL

unless the Prime Minister made a statement assuring the people of Ulster that the Government had the will not only to secure a political settlement enabling the people to participate in decision-making but also to defeat the terrorists. Could he expect a statement within 12 hours that would put life and hope into the people of Ulster? If such a statement were forthcoming, it would get him to the Conference. The Prime Minister said that she had made a statement after the Mountbatten murders. She had seen Mr. Lynch. New security measures had been put in hand. In short, she had taken action. If there were more action to be taken she would take it. After Dr. Paisley had repeated his wish for a statement and the Prime Minister her pre-occupation with action rather than statements, Dr. Paisley said that the Prime Minister was not aware of the deterioration in the situation on the ground. She had a duty to do something about this. As an indication of the feeling of the people in Northern Ireland, Dr. Paisley produced two medals which had been sent to him by members of the UDR for return to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister said that if Dr. Paisley would let her have the addresses of the men she would write to them.

The discussion ended at 2125.

Paul

15 November 1979

CONFIDENTIAL