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Subject



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

19 December 1980

Dear Roy,

Meeting with Dr. Paisley

As you know, Dr. Ian Paisley called on the Prime Minister in her room at the House of Commons at 1130 this morning. The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, and Mr. Peter Robinson, MP were also present. I enclose a copy of the statement which Dr. Paisley read to the Prime Minister and subsequently issued to the Press. I also enclose a copy of the statement issued by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary on her behalf at 2.15 this afternoon.

Dr. Paisley's statement and that issued from here cover, of course, the substance of the meeting. However, it may be useful for you to have, in the form of a commentary on Dr. Paisley's statement, some of the exchanges which took place between the Prime Minister and Dr. Paisley as the meeting proceeded.

Paragraph 1: The Prime Minister said that the Ulster Protestants had not been betrayed nor would they be. She had repeatedly made plain her personal commitment to the guarantee. Dr. Paisley did not dispute the Prime Minister's personal position but said that his statement described the feelings of people in Northern Ireland. He added that having beaten all other Unionist candidates in the election for the European Parliament, he could claim with justice to be speaking for the vast majority in Northern Ireland. To Dr. Paisley's comment about the citizens of Northern Ireland who had been killed, the Prime Minister replied that many families in the United Kingdom had also lost sons in Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 2: The Prime Minister said that the British Government's guarantee meant precisely that the Government would support the rights and liberties of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 4: The Prime Minister said she protested most vigorously against the statement that the people of Northern Ireland were being treated as second-class citizens. As regards the IRA, no-one had fought more fervently against them than she had.

Paragraph 5: The Prime Minister said there was nothing in the Dublin communique that need cause alarm. Alarm was being generated unnecessarily by the interpretations being given to the communique.

/Paragraph 6:



Paragraph 6: The Prime Minister said that the British Government's guarantee was to all the people in Northern Ireland. They would continue to be citizens of the United Kingdom unless they decided otherwise.

Paragraph 12: The Prime Minister said that the remarks in this paragraph and the next were simply wrong. There would be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of its people and a decision by the Westminster Parliament. She would never give up this guarantee. There had been no talk in Dublin about constitutions. She and Mr. Haughey had dealt only with institutions. Mr. Robinson referred to Mr. Lenihan's radio interview. The Prime Minister reminded him that Mr. Lenihan had subsequently withdrawn the remarks.

Paragraph 14: The Prime Minister repeated again that she would not go back on the guarantee. She said that she had been very concerned when Dr. Paisley had launched his proposal for a referendum in Great Britain. She had always stressed the need for the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Dr. Paisley's proposal appeared to fly in the face of this. Dr. Paisley said that the Prime Minister understood neither the people of Ulster nor Ulster Unionism. Any meeting in Dublin caused them concern and this was bound to be redoubled when it resulted in such a communique and when the Prime Minister refused to make a statement in the House of Commons. The joint studies were a source of particular alarm, the more so since they involved Ministers. The Prime Minister said that Dr. Paisley would have more cause for alarm if Ministers were not involved. Mr. Robinson said that it was the potential of the studies that alarmed him. It could easily include constitutional matters. The Prime Minister said that the communique did not envisage a discussion of constitutional issues. If Dr. Paisley and Mr. Robinson would not accept her word, there was of course a difficulty. Dr. Paisley said that giving Dublin "a free say" in the affairs of Northern Ireland flew in the face of everything the Prime Minister had said in the past. The Prime Minister repeated that she stood by the guarantee and that Dr. Paisley had done more to put the guarantee at risk than she had.

Paragraph 16: The Prime Minister said that constitutional change in the United Kingdom could only be implemented through the Westminster Parliament. Dr. Paisley said that the mention of Parliament implied the possibility of change. The Ulster Unionists view was that constitutional change could only be authorised by the people as a whole. They would have to be consulted.

At this point the Prime Minister said to Dr. Paisley that he seemed to be becoming somewhat worked up. Dr. Paisley said that he was not worked up and that it was an insult to suggest that he was. He was speaking on behalf of his people and would not be begged, bargained or bribed into a compromise. The Prime Minister said that Dr. Paisley's tone and his statement were very wounding to her personally. She had stood firmly by the guarantee and would go on doing so. She had defended the rule of law. She had defended the security of Northern Ireland with British soldiers. It was totally wrong and totally unjustified that she should now be accused of betrayal. Dr. Paisley repeated that the people of Northern Ireland considered they had been let down.

/paragraph 17:



Paragraph 17: The Prime Minister said that the Government had tried to find a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland through talks. They had not succeeded but they would try again. She was very appreciative of the fact that Dr. Paisley's Party had participated in the talks. Dr. Paisley acknowledged the last point but asked the Prime Minister how he was expected to feel when the proposals submitted in those talks by Mr. Hume - a submission which was out of order - had been enshrined in the Dublin communique.

Referring to paragraph 6 of the communique, Dr. Paisley said the Prime Minister could not expect him to welcome mutual understanding with a Government that claimed authority over the place where he lived and which refused to extradite murderers. Mr. Haughey's failure to hand over the murderers of at least 15 men in Fermanagh when their identities were well-known, showed that his Government was "base and dishonourable". The Prime Minister knew what had happened to the Sunningdale Agreement. The people of Ulster had been told then the same thing as they were being told now and they viewed the present situation in the same way as they had viewed Sunningdale. Indeed the communique was even more dangerous. At least the Sunningdale Agreement had set up arrangements under which the Unionists would have been at the table. The Prime Minister said that the joint studies would not lead directly to decisions. They were studies and their results would be open to further discussion. Mr. Rossi pointed out that there was a need for closer co-operation where electricity, gas and tourism were concerned. Joint studies would be useful. It would be an advantage if the two countries could work more closely together. Dr. Paisley commented that under Stormont co-operation of this kind had been done through Government Departments. Mr. Robinson said that there was no need to set up institutions to deal with talks on these matters. He referred again to concern about the reference to the totality of the relationships. The Prime Minister repeated that the studies would not give rise directly to decisions and that constitutional relationships were not at issue. Dr. Paisley said that he and the Prime Minister "were at odds". He could not be expected to accept a communique which had been described by John Hume and the SDLP as "a good day's work".

I am sending copies of this letter and its enclosures to Paul Lever (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*James Sweeney*

*Nicholas Alexander*

Roy Harrington, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.



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The Prime Minister saw Dr. Paisley in her room at the House of Commons this morning. The meeting lasted for 35 minutes. Dr. Paisley read the text of a statement which he has subsequently released to the press.

The Prime Minister made it clear to Dr. Paisley that she was dismayed by the tone of his statement. She challenged a number of points in it. The Prime Minister did not accept that there was any question of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland being treated as second-class citizens or of their being betrayed. HMG adhered absolutely to its policy. This was, as she had repeated in her letter to Dr. Paisley on 10 December, that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and will remain so unless its people and the Westminster Parliament decide otherwise. British soldiers as well as members of the RUC and of the UDR, had given their lives to defend the rule of law in Northern Ireland. The British Government's determination would not weaken.

The Prime Minister told Dr. Paisley that in her view he himself had raised a question about the guarantee by his proposal for a referendum of the people of Great Britain. This appeared to remove from the people of Northern Ireland responsibility for determining their own future.

/The Government



The Government of the Republic of Ireland were well aware of the British Government's position on the guarantee. The Prime Minister made it clear to Dr. Paisley that his fears about the Dublin communique had no foundation in reality. Constitutional change was not in question. The joint studies would deal with practical matters, such as electricity, energy and tourism, where progress would be of advantage to all. Possible new institutional structures would be studied to see whether they could usefully give expression to the unique relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic. The joint studies, once completed, would be the subject of further discussion rather than of immediate decision.

The Government will continue to work for peace, reconciliation and stability in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister hopes that she will have the co-operation of Dr. Paisley in that effort.

19 December 1980