

RECORD OF A CALL ON THE LORD PRIVY SEAL BY THE REV. IAN PAISLEY
AT 3 PM ON THURSDAY, 17 DECEMBER 1981

N. S. P. R.

Present:

Rev. Ian Paisley MP MEP
Mr Peter Robinson, MP
Mr Jim Allister
Mr David Burnside

Lord Privy Seal
Lord N Gordon Lennox
Mr Tom Arnold MP
Mr Eyers
Mr Gomersall
Mr Wood
Mr Thomas

Mr 23/12

1. Mr Paisley said that he wished to know what was Her Majesty's Government's attitude towards the delegation, which represented the majority of the Unionists in Northern Ireland and would be visiting the USA from 15-28 January 1982. Were the Government against it, neutral or did the delegation have their goodwill? His feedback from the United States suggested that the Government's attitude was one of neutrality and perhaps opposition, but not of goodwill. While they had great differences with the Government, this visit was completely based on an apologetic for the Union and contained no criticism of any British Government, past or present. The delegation would take a strong line against that taken by the Irish Republic and fellow travellers and against terrorism. He had some people 'pretty high up in Washington'. They had said that the American Government had been sounding out the British Foreign Office as to what their reaction would be if his visa was revoked.

2. The Lord Privy Seal replied that the Government's point of view was precisely what it would be for any other representatives in Parliament of a minor party - in Westminster terms. If the Government was sponsoring the visit, which it almost invariably did if a group was mixed and represented all parties, then we would take certain steps to encourage the host government to do certain things. But for a group of MPs travelling privately, the treatment was absolutely standard. What we would do in the case of this delegation was the same as for any other private visit, no more and no less. The Government were not sponsoring this visit.

Mr Paisley said that the delegation did not want to be sponsored: that would ruin their visit. In answer to a question from the Lord Privy Seal, Lord Gordon Lennox reaffirmed that what British posts in North America were doing to help this delegation was exactly the same as it would be for any other similar visit.

3. Mr Paisley asked whether the State Department had approached the Foreign Office about his visa. The Lord Privy Seal said that they had not. Mr Paisley asked what the Government's attitude would be if they did. The Lord Privy Seal replied that if the State Department approached the FCO we would draw their attention to the fact that Mr Paisley was an elected MP and an elected MEP and ask them to take that into account. We would not seek to advise them.

4. Mr Burnside said that the group had received some assistance from consulates in North America, particularly Boston. They needed particular assistance: an official call on the Ambassador when they arrived; that all Consuls-General and Honorary Consuls should be informed of their programme and be asked to give assistance; and they would like the Embassy to make official requests to the State Department for them to be received by those members of the Administration that they had asked to see, including the President and the Secretary of State. Mr Paisley said that they were not expecting the President to receive them, it would only be realistic to expect to be received by the Secretary of State. They would be grateful if the Embassy would lobby. The Administration had met other MPs from Northern Ireland, including Members of the European Parliament, although the President had not himself received John Hume. The State Department had said that they needed the Foreign Office to clear the visitors.

5. The Lord Privy Seal said that the Ambassador would receive them when they arrived and heads of other posts would too, if they were in town at the time. The Embassy would inform other posts in the USA of the delegation's plans. He understood that the Embassy had already passed to the State Department the delegation's requests to meet members of the Administration. But if not, he would ensure that the requests were passed on to the Ambassador and that the latter would pass them on to the State Department, drawing attention to who the delegation were.

6. Mr Burnside handed over an outline programme, and copies of letters he had sent to the President and the British Ambassador (attached). He said that the delegation had also approached leading Americans outside the Administration and it was possible that they would also seek advice from the Embassy. The Lord Privy Seal said that if they approached the Embassy, the latter would inform them of the composition of the delegation, and tell them who the delegation were and what they represented. Whether these figures then received the delegation or not was up to them.

7. Mr Paisley described a new book that would be the basis of their visit. It was a very good book. It answered all the points made by propaganda against the Union; and for the first time contained full colour prints of terrorist atrocities. The Americans had listened too long to another line. The case for the Union was a good one. This book would be an eloquent witness. The Lord Privy Seal said that he would like to see a copy of the book.

8. Reverting to the question of visas, Mr Allister asked whether the Foreign Office would inform the State Department of the delegation's status only if the State Department asked. The Lord Privy Seal said that if the Americans did not approach us we would not say anything. We would not expect other governments to offer us advice in a similar situation. Mr Allister asked whether the Government should not play a more active rôle. The Lord Privy Seal said that they should not and had not done so on a recent similar occasion. Mr Allister asked whether there were any circumstances in which the Government would take the initiative. He thought that there were arguments for taking an initiative on this occasion. The Lord Privy Seal said that there might be a case if no-one knew who Mr Paisley was, or if the delegation was officially sponsored. But Mr Paisley was well known and he had said they did not wish to be sponsored. Mr Paisley said that of course the delegation did not want to be sponsored: they would be accused of being British Government propagandists. The delegation was going to the United States to justify the existence of the Northern Ireland state within the United Kingdom. He thought that the fact that he was

a Member of the European Parliament worried the American Government because they were concerned about their bases in Europe.

9. Mr Robinson asked what rôle the Foreign Office played on security. The Lord Privy Seal replied that we relied on the host country. If the delegation went the Americans would make their own arrangements. Mr Paisley said he had been told that the Foreign Office should point out to the State Department that he had police protection. He often went to the USA to preach and normally did not want protection. But this occasion was more political and it would be in the Americans' interest if he was protected. Lord Gordon Lennox said that we had spoken to the Americans. If they judged that there was a threat they would make appropriate arrangements. The Lord Privy Seal repeated that it was for the Americans to assess the threat. Mr Arnold said that on a visit to New York during the hunger strike the police had told Mr Alison, then a Northern Ireland Office Minister, that they were not disposed to give him protection. Mr Paisley said that the Americans had offered him protection before: in New York he had even had motorcycle outriders. He was genuinely concerned about security. The IRA did not want the delegation to go. He did not believe that there would be many of 'us' left by the end of the year. The delegation would have to know before they left whether or not they were going to receive protection from the authorities because if they did not they would make their own arrangements. The Lord Privy Seal said that we would be unlikely to know any more than the delegation exactly what protection they would get. Mr Eyers pointed out that the decision as to whether to protect would be made at state and city level and that it might be difficult to get precise details. Mr Paisley said that the Foreign Office had to tell the Americans that all three Parliamentarians had bodyguard protection. Mr Paisley was guarded even on the Continent. Mr Robinson and Mr Taylor were only guarded in Northern Ireland, though Mr Taylor had on occasions received protection in Europe. The Lord Privy Seal said that at the appropriate time it would be proper for us to try and discover what level of protection was to be provided and to pass on what information we could give.

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