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Prime Minister 4

Some first thoughts

for tomorrow's meeting.

I have told Mr. King's office that he should come armed with some practical suggestions

B.07335

[Mr. Hume's letter is behind]

MR POWELL

c Mr Stark

Northern Ireland: Meeting of Ministers on 20 February

how to take matters forward on devolution. CDP 19/2.

I understand that the main purpose of the Prime Minister's meeting tomorrow will be to consider the line for the Prime Minister's meeting with unionist leaders on 25 February.

2. A preliminary list of points which the Prime Minister might raise in her meeting with unionist leaders was attached to my minute of 31 January to you. I think it still provides a reasonable basis for the Prime Minister's brief. It is helpful that the Irish Government apparently intend to announce before the Prime Minister's meeting with the unionists that they will sign the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism without waiting for legislation to go through the Dail.

3. If the unionist leaders were to suggest to the Prime Minister that she call a round table conference of the Northern Ireland parties to talk about devolution, on the basis that the implementation of the Agreement would first be suspended, the Prime Minister could reply that she would be glad to consider the idea of a round table conference and to explore it with the SDLP, but that there would be no suspension of the working of the Agreement meanwhile. The unionists would not be likely to agree to such an arrangement, but a response on these lines by the Prime Minister would leave the Government in a good presentational position.

4. I have suggested to his officials that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should come to the meeting of Ministers with definite suggestions about means of consulting

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unionist leaders on matters under consideration in the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. One idea under consideration in the Northern Ireland Office is that the unionists might be asked to put forward their suggestion about a mechanism. I think that this would invite proposals which we would be bound to refuse. Another idea under consideration is for a "parallel conference" between the Government and the unionists, at which subjects under consideration in the Intergovernmental Conference would be discussed. But that would risk becoming formal and cumbersome; and unionists might suggest terms of reference mirroring the relevant parts of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, including the obligation to make "determined efforts.... to resolve any difficulties". A better idea might be for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to offer the unionist leaders a monthly meeting to discuss matters of current interest in Northern Ireland, including many of those being discussed in the Intergovernmental Conference. The purpose of making an offer of this kind to the unionists would of course be tactical in the short term: there is little chance of their agreeing in their present mood to regular contacts with the Northern Ireland Secretary.

5. The Northern Ireland Secretary may raise at the meeting of Ministers the question of an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary body in line with Article 12 of the Agreement and the question of altered arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business in the House of Commons. On the former, I think that all the Ministers concerned agree that we should not move quickly; and on the latter the key question is whether any arrangements can be devised which would both please unionist MPs and not go against the Government's aim of devolution in Northern Ireland.

6. There are two other subjects which are being handled separately but might be raised at the meeting of Ministers. The first is a suggestion by the Northern Ireland Secretary

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that another battalion of the army should be sent to Northern Ireland. I understand that the Defence Secretary is being advised to acquiesce in this suggestion, on the condition that an early review of the tasks currently undertaken by the army in Northern Ireland takes place, to see whether any could be shifted to the police. In my view the important point in favour of sending another battalion, which is not made in the Northern Ireland Secretary's minute of 13 February, is that, with the security forces already at full stretch, there may well be a need for reinforcements during the loyalist marching season in the summer and it is politically easier to send a battalion before then.

7. The other issue being handled separately is a proposal by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that candidates for elected office in the Province should be asked to sign a declaration that they support no proscribed organisation. The Lord Chancellor has agreed in principle to this. Difficult questions of enforcement, which would probably be through the civil courts, are still being examined by officials. The proposed measure would no doubt please the unionists. I hope there is no risk that Sinn Fein candidates would win more votes after they had (mendaciously) signed such a declaration.

C L G Mallaby

19 February 1986

Preliminary List of points which the Prime Minister might
raise in her meeting with Unionist leaders

1. The Government stand by the Anglo-Irish Agreement and intend to make it work.
2. The Agreement reinforces the status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom and the position of the majority in determining the status of Northern Ireland.
3. The Molyneaux/Paisley statement of 28 January was wrong in claiming that the Agreement established joint authority between London and Dublin in Northern Ireland.
4. The Molyneaux/Paisley statement was also wrong in saying that the Agreement had created instability in Northern Ireland. On the contrary, instability is fostered by intemperate misrepresentations of the Agreement. The Government understand the feelings of unionists about the Agreement, but unionist leaders must take account of their responsibility to help to maintain stable administration and their responsibility towards the House of Commons and indeed the union.
5. There is no question of the Government giving undue weight to the views of the Republic in relation to Northern Ireland. As before, great weight will be attached to the views of everyone in Northern Ireland and notably the unionist majority.
6. The Government are determined that the results of the work of the Intergovernmental Conference should benefit all the people of Northern Ireland.

Preliminary list cont'd.

7. The Government are working all out for improved co-operation with the Irish Republic against terrorism. Reference to the seizure of arms in the Republic on 26 January. We look for more successes of this kind. Reference to the question of Irish accession to the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism.
8. The by-elections in Northern Ireland produced a notable swing in the nationalist vote from Sinn Fein to the SDLP. That is a success for constitutional politics and a set-back for terrorism.
9. Since the by-elections, we are increasing our pressure on the SDLP to come out in support for the RUC and to encourage Roman Catholics to join.
[Mention any further statement on this by Mr Hume.]
10. If unionists want to reduce the scope of the work of the Intergovernmental Conference, they should surely explore moves towards devolution. We are pressing the SDLP to move in that direction.
11. We understand your wish to be better informed about the work of the Intergovernmental Conference. The Northern Ireland Secretary is ready to discuss arrangements for this.
12. [Possibly something about Parliamentary arrangements - either changes in the handling of Northern Ireland business in the House of Commons or the question of a Parliamentary body under Article 12 of the Agreement.]