

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND
THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION ON MONDAY, 24 FEBRUARY, 1986, AT
1930 IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Kinnock noted that the Prime Minister would be meeting the Unionist Party Leaders on 25 February. He himself had recently seen Mr. Robinson of the DUP. Many rumours were circulating about the situation in the North. Trade union sources provided little evidence of support for sustained industrial action. In this respect the situation was different from 1974. There was probably stronger support for a boycott of goods from the Republic. But this was unlikely to have much effect. There was evidence that the para militaries were arming themselves. The Ulster Clubs now claimed some 8,000 members including many younger men. Allegations had been made of alienation in the RUC. The Taoiseach had made clear his concern about the growing strength of the para militaries. Mr. Kinnock concluded that the situation in the North was volatile, but not quite as alarming as he had thought a week ago. The Unionist Leaders would no doubt claim that matters were about to slip out of their control. This might be partly tactical.

Mr. Kinnock continued that about one third of the people of Northern Ireland seemed prepared to register support in opinion polls for the process set in motion by the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He suggested an additional effort might be mounted by the Government to explain exactly what the Agreement was and what it was not. Such an effort would be evidence of confidence in the process on the part of the Government and would put the Unionist leaders on the defensive. It might also succeed in winning a crucial few percent more supporters for the Agreement among moderate Unionists.

The Prime Minister enquired whether Mr. Kinnock thought that claims by members of the Irish Government about the role which the Agreement gave them in the North were a major source of aggravation to Unionist opinion. Mr. Kinnock had no

particular reason to think this. The basic problem was congenital suspicion between the communities rather than alarm at what was being said south of the border. The problem was magnified by disinformation disseminated by Unionist political leaders. It was important to try to neutralise this.

The Prime Minister enquired about Mr. Robinson's views. Mr. Kinnock said that while publicly a zealot, Mr. Robinson was privately alarmed at the scale of the reaction among Unionists against the Agreement. The Prime Minister asked whether UDI had been mentioned as an aim. Mr. Kinnock thought that talk of UDI was mostly rhetoric and was unlikely to win any widespread support. It had not been made an issue in the by-elections.

Mr. Kinnock asked whether it was the Government's intention to offer the Unionists a consultation mechanism which would allow them to put forward their views on issues to be considered by the Intergovernmental Conference. The Prime Minister indicated that this was likely but would not in itself be enough to satisfy the Unionists.

Mr. Kinnock said that he and his colleagues were encouraging the SDLP not to preen themselves or claim that they were the prime beneficiaries from the Agreement. The Prime Minister said that the SDLP had not yet lived up to their protestations of willingness to play a positive role in discussions on devolution. They must show genuine readiness to sit down and talk with the Unionists. Mr. Kinnock agreed and offered help in this respect.

Mr. Kinnock asked whether agreement was close on a Code of Conduct for the RUC. He had the impression that there was no great resistance to this on the part of the RUC itself. The Prime Minister said that a draft of the Code was well advanced.

Mr. Kinnock suggested that further consideration should be given to establishing an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary tier.

He wondered whether a Committee of the House might be set up to examine the prospects. The members would have to be chosen carefully. The Prime Minister said that too rapid progress on this would alarm the Unionists. They would need to be assured that such a body would be a UK/Republic structure not an All Ireland one.

Mr. Kinnock said that if the lid could be kept on Northern Ireland over the next few months, he believed that the Anglo-Irish Agreement could win gradual acquiescence. The Prime Minister agreed that it was important to try to maintain calm and avoid the situation erupting. But the Government were determined to implement the Agreement and would not be deflected from this. Mr. Kinnock said that there was no question but that this was the right course. That was why he had advised further efforts to explain and publicise the Agreement.

C.D.P.

CDP

24 February, 1986.

bc PC file to



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 February, 1986.

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

I enclose a note of the Prime Minister's discussion this evening with the Leader of the Opposition on Northern Ireland. It is for the personal information of your Secretary of State only.

I am sending copies of this letter and its enclosure to Len Appleyard for the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to Murdo Maclean for the Chief Whip, and to Michael Stark for Sir Robert Armstrong.

(C.D. Powell)

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