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CCPC
DC C. Mallaby

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

27 February 1986

Dear Jim,

Northern Ireland

The Prime Minister held a brief meeting following Cabinet this morning to discuss contingency plans for the one-day strike in Northern Ireland on 3 March. The Lord President, the Northern Ireland Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Chief Whip and Sir Robert Armstrong were present.

The Northern Ireland Secretary said that a distinction had to be drawn between a one-day strike of the sort proposed for 3 March, and more extensive or repeated strike action. It was difficult to counter the former. Although it was hard to assess the likely impact, it was probable that a substantial number of Unionists would want to express their feelings about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Efforts were being made through the CBI, Chambers of Commerce, church leaders and the Trade Unions to discourage widespread participation in the strike. It was for consideration whether the help of the Labour Party should also be sought. The army and the RUC had been fully briefed, particularly on the importance of keeping streets clear and enabling people to get to work. Were the strike to be followed by more prolonged industrial action, the Northern Ireland Office might need some reinforcement. Meanwhile it was necessary to use every opportunity to bring home to the Unionist community the full scope of the proposals which the Prime Minister had made to Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley.

In discussion the following points were made:

- (i) although the Government's case was getting across, as reflected by criticism of the performance of the Unionist parties in the Belfast papers, there should be no slackening of effort. The Prime Minister should write to Archbishop Eames of the Church of Ireland to follow up their talks of the day before. The letter should explain clearly that devolution in the North would reduce the scope of the Intergovernmental Conference. It should also set out the four points on which the Prime Minister had made

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proposals to the Unionist leaders. The letter should be published and widely publicised.

- (ii) voluntary agencies such as Help the Aged should be urged to discourage participation in the strike and to draw attention to the particular risks from it for the elderly and the sick.
- (iii) everything possible should be done to prevent the strike being seen as a success. Otherwise the Unionists would be encouraged to undertake further actions.
- (iv) it was essential that the Government should retain the initiative and keep up the flow of information to people in Northern Ireland, to counter scare stories and disseminate an accurate picture of the events. This had enabled the then Government to resist the 1977 strike successfully in contrast to 1974.
- (v) it was essential to protect people who wanted to work, as well as their families. The RUC should be used for this as necessary (though it was recognised that this was more relevant to a protracted than to a one-day strike).
- (vi) the RUC should be thoroughly briefed on their priority tasks, in particular to prevent or dismantle roadblocks on the edges of housing estates and to arrest those causing an obstruction.
- (vii) special measures might be required to protect broadcasting facilities.
- (viii) the Head of the Civil Service should consider urgently with departments concerned the Northern Ireland Office's need for reinforcement, both for operational and for information work.
- (ix) the Prime Minister should take a firm line in the House of Commons, pointing to the danger that the strike could lead to the erosion of support for the Union in the United Kingdom. It was important to dispel the Unionists belief that strike action would soon bring the Government to heel.
- (x) there would probably need to be a statement to the House on 4 March.

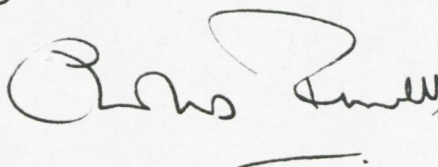
I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Lord President, the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary,

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the Defence Secretary, the Chancellor of the Duchy of
Lancaster, the Chief Whip and Sir Robert Armstrong.

yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles Powell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the closing "yours sincerely,". There is a horizontal line drawn under the signature.

Charles Powell

Jim Daniell Esq
Northern Ireland Office.

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