

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH MR. JAMES KILFEDDER

A I attach a brief for your meeting with Mr. Kilfedder tomorrow. The main point is to bring home to him the damage done by yesterday's strike and the need to move rapidly to the discussions which you offered Dr. Paisley and Mr. Molyneux when they have called on you.

You may also like to say some words of appreciation for the steadying role which he has played as Speaker of the Assembly.

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C At the end of the meeting, you may wish to seek his agreement to a statement which would be issued following the pattern of your meetings with Mr. Molyneux, Dr. Paisley and Mr. Hume. A Northern Ireland draft is in the folder. In case you feel that this is too long and a bit much for Mr. Kilfedder to swallow, I attach a shorter alternative version.

C D P

(C. D. POWELL)

4 March 1986

SRWAQE

CONFIDENTIAL

Sir Edward du Cann: Will my right hon. Friend look again at the figures for the appalling decline in Britain's merchant fleet? Is she aware that hon. Members in all parts of the House are now desperately concerned about this matter and its implications, both for our defence policy and economically? We could not mount another Falklands operation if we wished because we do not have the ships. More than 80 per cent. of British trade is now carried in ships with foreign flags. Is she aware that there are things that could be done to change the situation? Will she instruct her senior colleagues to see that they are done, and done without delay?

The Prime Minister: I know my right hon. Friend's interest in this subject, but I must disagree with him when he says that we could not mount another Falklands operation. We could. I would like to make that clear. The Government fully recognise the role that the merchant fleet plays in times of emergency and war and the requirements are subject to continuous review. The merchant fleet

remains capable of meeting all the needs of the armed forces. We have long-standing NATO arrangements pool Alliance merchant shipping should there be war. The important thing for the future of our merchant marine is to ensure that British shipping can compete with the fleets of other nations on costs. That is one of the problems.

Mr. Terry Davis: In view of the widespread impression that the Cabinet is biased in favour of a takeover of parts of the British motor industry by General Motors and the rumours that are now spreading in Birmingham, will the Prime Minister tell us whether any member of the Cabinet has a relative working for General Motors or one of its subsidiaries?

The Prime Minister: I resent the implication of the hon. Gentleman's question. The hon. Gentleman is aware that bids are in today and that they will be considered, and they will be considered with one thing in mind—what will give British industry the best chance of jobs.

Northern Ireland

9.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the events in Northern Ireland yesterday.

As the House will be aware, the leaders of the two main Unionist parties had called for a day of action and protest. They invited everybody to stay away from work and stated that it was to be a passive and voluntary demonstration and that there should be no road blocks or intimidation of those going to work.

In the event, there was widespread obstruction, intimidation and some violence during the day culminating in serious disorder in east and north Belfast last night. The first incidents occurred before midnight on Sunday and disturbances continued until the early hours of this morning.

In spite of these difficulties, a very considerable number of people succeeded in getting to work, particularly in the commercial offices and public services, but many factories were seriously affected.

I pay tribute to the determination of all those who refused to be intimidated and exercised their right to go to work. I also pay tribute to the men of the security forces and particularly the Royal Ulster Constabulary for all the work that they did to seek to keep roads open for people to be able to get to work. However, there have also been a number of complaints when it is alleged that the police did not take action when it was required. The Chief Constable is preparing a full report on all the policing aspects of the past 24 hours.

To give the House some indication of the scale of the workload that the RUC faced, on the latest information available to me there were some 655 road blocks in the province during the period, of which 441 were cleared. There were in addition some 80 cavalcades and demonstrations, which caused considerable disruption in a number of towns mainly around midday and in the afternoon. There were 57 arrests and the names of 184 people noted to proceed by way of summons. Sixty-five plastic baton rounds were fired and 47 policemen were injured. Last night there were a number of petrol bombs thrown, and there were over 20 shots fired in three firearms attacks on the police during the disturbances in the Loyalist areas.

The figures listed above give the details of a tragic day for Northern Ireland. Many Members will have seen some of the disgraceful incidents on television last night. These pictures have been shown all over the world and will do great damage to the reputation of the Province. The House will also have seen elected Members of this House making common cause with people in paramilitary dress.

The Government are well aware of the strength of feeling among many Unionists about aspects of the Anglo-Irish agreement. The House will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I met the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) last Tuesday. During a long meeting my right hon. Friend put forward a number of proposals to help meet their main concerns and agreed to consider positively their suggestions that the Government should call a round table conference to discuss devolution in Northern Ireland. It

was agreed that we would all reflect on the various suggestions that had been made and would meet again shortly. The prospects of constructive discussions instead of confrontation were greeted with widespread relief in the Province, only for that to be destroyed by their abrupt repudiation of this course following a meeting in Belfast late that night. They then decided to proceed with the day of protest.

The whole country can now see how tragic and totally counter-productive yesterday's action has been. It is now urgent that the Unionist leaders recognise again that the only way in which the concerns of those they seek to represent can be addressed is by constructive discussion and not by threats and violence. The degree of intimidation evident yesterday showed how little confidence many of the organisers had in being able peacefully to persuade their fellow citizens to join their day of protest. I make it quite clear that this Government, this Parliament, will not be intimidated either by the sort of violent actions that took place yesterday. I believe that an increasing number of Unionists, while disliking many aspects of the Anglo-Irish agreement, wish to look for a constructive way forward. The Government have made quite clear our willingness to sit down and discuss seriously the Unionists' concerns. In our parliamentary democracy, in this United Kingdom, that can be the only way.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Does the Secretary of State accept that we on this side of the House share his abhorrence of the violence and intimidation which took place yesterday and which further alienated the sympathies of many people in Great Britain from the cause which it was apparently designed to promote?

Does the Secretary of State agree that if the protest was intended to demonstrate the strength of feeling in Northern Ireland against the Anglo-Irish agreement it failed as an indicator since we do not know how many people participated voluntarily and how many simply responded to intimidation? Bearing in mind the number of road blocks and the obvious evidence of preparations in advance, can the Secretary of State say whether investigations are taking place to ascertain whether the violence was planned and, if so, by whom? If it transpires that it was planned, will proceedings be initiated against those responsible?

While we join in the right hon. Gentleman's tribute to those police officers who strove hard, in difficult circumstances, to preserve order and to prevent intimidation, and while we offer our tribute to those who declined to be intimidated, he has referred to allegations of some incidents in which people were prevented from going about their business in the presence of police officers who failed to intervene. When the Chief Constable's report on these allegations is complete, will the Secretary of State report again to the House?

Will inquiries take place into reports that some off-duty members of the Ulster Defence Regiment were at the barricades? The Secretary of State has referred to suggestions from responsible leaders among all sections of opinion in Northern Ireland that they are prepared to meet those with whom they disagree to discuss how to make progress. Will he again invite them to meet together under his chairmanship and seek consensus, which will isolate the men of violence on both sides of the divide and offer a less dismaying future for the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Member for the way in which he has responded to the agreement and to his right hon. and hon. Friends for their support in this matter. He may have seen in the comments of the Chief Constable before the strike the clearest signs that this was to be a peaceful, dignified and voluntary protest. It manifestly was not so—and that was made manifest in ways that showed considerable planning in advance. I know that the Chief Constable will want to investigate all the policing aspects of what occurred yesterday. He has already put on the record that any evidence of incidents of indifferent policing should be brought to his attention and will be investigated.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked specifically about an invitation to the parties in Northern Ireland to talk sensibly about these problems. I hope that we can get discussions going. As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put some specific proposals to the leaders of the Unionist parties. This could have provided the way forward, but was repudiated, although in Northern Ireland only—we have not received any official communication to that effect. I shall do all that I can to seek ways in which discussions can start. That is the only way. Violence will not succeed, and will be only counter-productive.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is it not a tragic absurdity that, as a result of the Anglo-Irish agreement, a Unionist Government's only political friends in the Province should be Republicans? How do the Government propose to govern the Province—by force—or will they seek a constructive way out, and get in touch with the Taoiseach and adjust this damnable agreement?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend knows very well that what he said about the support for the agreement in the Province is not true, and that many people with no nationalist sympathies see benefits in this agreement and have supported it. Clearly the problem—and I hope that my hon. Friend will assist in this—is to get a true understanding of what the agreement is. The literature that was being passed out yesterday, in which the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) played his part, talking about the establishment of partial Dublin rule and allowing the agreement to bring about the all-Ireland that it seeks, makes one realise how great are the distortions still being perpetrated on the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we share his sentiments about yesterday's appalling events in the Province? We are reassured by the last paragraph of his statement. That is the right way to proceed and we support him all the way. We acknowledge the genuine feelings of Unionists who have suffered grievously at the hands of the IRA, the Provisional IRA and INLA, but is it not time that the Unionist leaders in the Province and Unionists themselves recognise that there is not an inexhaustible supply of finance from the rest of the United Kingdom, and that people from the rest of the United Kingdom also have the right to say "Enough is enough"? What about the workers at Harland and Wolff and Short Bros, which have been financed by large sums of money from here? Why did they stay away from work yesterday?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support on behalf of his right hon. and hon. colleagues. Both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have made clear our strong hope and desire that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom. Perhaps one of the most offensive things about some of the aspects of the protests is the implication that we are seeking to undermine the position of Northern Ireland. The purpose of the agreement is to reassure the Unionists about the validity of the position of the majority, and to get the agreement of the Republic confirmed in an international agreement to say that there can be no change in that majority position without the consent of the majority. The House will see that, even in the face of that, there are those who will refuse to accept it, no matter that it is article 1 of the agreement and should be a great reassurance to Unionists in Northern Ireland.

Sir Peter Mills (Torrige and Devon West): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that the protest was not so much a demonstration but, in certain parts, a rebellion? Speaking from experience, I can say that nothing like that has happened before. Will my right hon. Friend also bear in mind that the £2,000 million poured into the Province at least demands some responsibility from the other side?

Mr. King: It has always been accepted in the United Kingdom that the areas in greatest need receive a greater subvention than other areas. In that respect, Northern Ireland is no different from other parts of the country in relation to the assessment of need.

However, in response to the first point raised by my hon. Friend, may I say that it is particularly tragic that at a time of considerable terrorist activity such an additional strain should have been placed on the security forces as was placed on them yesterday. That involved a massive redeployment of the RUC to maintain law and order and the rights of the citizen against the so-called Loyalist mobs in certain areas. People were definitely put at risk from terrorist attack in other parts of the Province.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): In view of the concluding words of the Secretary of State's statement, will the Government take steps to proceed towards giving all the people of Northern Ireland a full share in what the right hon. Gentleman calls this parliamentary democracy?

Mr. King: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's views on this matter. I am not sure that his views are shared by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor).

The government are anxious to achieve a system for administration in Northern Ireland on a basis that is widely acceptable to both communities. We have made that aim absolutely clear and the agreement is designed to encourage that.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that it is wrong for him to come to the House and make splendid statements about not yielding to intimidation—which I agree with—when at the end of the day carrying out that policy depends on the courage and resolution of our security forces and, in particular, on the men and women of the RUC? Will he therefore show just a little more understanding of the human position of those police officers who are shot in the back by the violent minority and who now no longer have the consent of the majority and yet are gagged by their

of the community yesterday? Does he agree that the agreement is about recognising the validity of both traditions in Northern Ireland, and that Unionists can stomach equality of treatment for the people of Northern Ireland? Does he further agree that equality is the true basis of dialogue which is essential, if the community is to move forward? Will he name the date for the talks that he wishes to hold, and my party will attend?

Mr. King: On the question of damage or harm being suffered, there are already signs of the benefit that come from the agreement. Any intelligent Unionist must take comfort from the switch in votes from the party supporting violence to the hon. Gentleman's constitutional nationalist party which occurred in each of the by-elections in which there was a contest between those two parties. Any Unionist who is willing to look fairly at the agreement will begin to notice the encouraging signs of better co-operation on cross-border security. That is overwhelmingly to the benefit of every person in Northern Ireland. I hope that the people will see through the lies that they are being told, such as that this is joint authority and this is Dublin rule. Those slogans, on which the by-election campaigns were fought, are wholly untrue, and people will increasingly realise that. I hope that then we shall get men of good will, who do not act merely from bigotry and prejudice, but are prepared to look fairly at the position of the minority as well as the majority. Then we can start sensible discussions to the benefit of all concerned.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): If we go on like this, with the majority in Northern Ireland feeling threatened and some of them taking desperate measures, and with my right hon. Friend condemning them in the strongest terms, as he has today, will not even the minority feel threatened? Will not the position become far worse than it already is? Does that not point to the fact that the Anglo-Irish agreement was a blunder of the first magnitude?

Mr. King: In my statement I paid tribute to the number of people who, often at considerable inconvenience and with considerable courage, ensured that people were not intimidated yesterday. The vast majority of people in many areas got to work, despite all the difficulties. My hon. Friend also chooses to overlook the fact that only a week ago today my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I met the leaders of the two Unionist parties and achieved an outcome which could have led to sensible, constructive talks. That is the way we must go, and the sooner the better.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Has the Secretary of State read the report on the front page of *The Irish Times* today entitled "Bottles, bricks and bigotry in Portadown" by Willy Clingan, a Northern Irish Protestant? He said that he saw none of the activity, on the part of either the RUC or the security forces, which the Secretary of State claimed. I dare say that that was just a black spot, although I would be surprised if it was the only one. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that, should there be a recurrence of yesterday's events in Northern Ireland, there will not be a repetition in Portadown, otherwise how will he and most hon. Members, who welcome the tone of the statement today, do their bit to help the RUC and in the spirit of the agreement?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I hope that we can get the hon. Members involved to play their part in the House. Indeed, today one sees an increase in their attendance. I hope that we can debate these issues sensibly, and discuss the genuine anxieties of the people whom they seek to represent in this proper forum of the House of Commons.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Does the Secretary of State agree that, although the Anglo-Irish agreement has now been in place since 15 November, more than three months ago, it has not done any harm to any citizen in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that the only damage done has been self-inflicted, such as the serious damage to wide sections of the community yesterday? Does he agree that the only damage done has been self-inflicted, such as the serious damage to wide sections of the community yesterday?

Mr. King: I deeply resent the last sentence of my hon. Friend's remarks. I have made it absolutely clear that the RUC is aware that it is my full commitment and support. I have the greatest admiration for the RUC as a professional police force. I am well aware of my hon. Friend's concern about consultation and the rights of the Police Federation in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend knows that that is under discussion at present.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that yesterday's day of protest, which in some cases was near insurrection, and the plans projected for the weeks and months ahead to culminate in July can only seriously weaken the link between Northern Ireland and this country? In the light of that, it is no good the Government ignoring the situation. A number of us in the House faced such a situation in 1974. The situation exists today. The Government must talk with the Government in Dublin about what will happen if the link is stretched to breaking point.

Mr. King: It was precisely because of our recognition of the concern about the situation and about aspects of the Anglo-Irish agreement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I met Unionist leaders last Tuesday. The Unionist leaders went to that meeting, as they said, expecting the door to be slammed in their faces. As the whole House will know, when they left the meeting they held a press conference and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneux) said that the deadlock had been broken. It is clear that a door has been opened. The tragedy is that when they returned to Belfast somebody else decided to slam a door in their face. We thought that we had succeeded in opening the way to sensible discussions. The best way to proceed is for the Prime Minister to talk to the leaders of the Unionist parties, who I would like to proceed. After the futile, destructive events of yesterday, I hope that wise counsels will prevail and that people will return to honour that agreement.

Mr. W. Beynon (Milton Keynes): Does my right hon. Friend recall the great tragedy which occurred when the Labour Government gave in to the Ulster workers' strike? Is it not now time for strong nerves? Does he accept that most Tory Members are right behind him in upholding the laws of the United Kingdom?

Mr. King: It is a time for strong nerves, but I hope also for wise counsels. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I hope that we can get the hon. Members involved to play their part in the House. Indeed, today one sees an increase in their attendance. I hope that we can debate these issues sensibly, and discuss the genuine anxieties of the people whom they seek to represent in this proper forum of the House of Commons.

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[Sir Eldon Griffiths]

Mr. King: In the atmosphere of claim and counterclaim about what the RUC did and did not do yesterday, I thought that the most helpful thing for the House would be for me to give the best statistics available at this time. The House will realise from the figures I gave of the Number of road blocks and the number which were removed that there were some gaps. I think that anybody would honestly say that it was quite a remarkable achievement to remove 441 road blocks over about 12 hours. I certainly am concerned, and I know that the Chief Constable is concerned, to learn any lessons that we can from the scale of the problems that were faced.

There is no doubt that the assertion, accepted in good faith and given by what the Chief Constable believed to be responsible leaders, about what was meant to be an orderly and dignified protest led, in some cases, to the police being too thinly spread in certain areas. That raised problems for them. I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that we wish to learn every lesson that we can.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, however deep and justified is the hostility of the people of Northern Ireland—the Unionist majority—to the Anglo-Irish agreement, the scenes of violence we saw yesterday are not only deeply repugnant to everybody on this side of the House but also injure the Unionist cause? If my right hon. Friend should receive a request from the Government of the Irish Republic that the intergovernmental Conference should not meet for, say, three months, would he consider it carefully?

Mr. King: I listened this morning to the entirely constructive remarks that my hon. Friend made in his broadcast when I was in Stormont. I respect the view that he has taken about the lack of wisdom of yesterday's action. I think that they were wise words and I wish that they had been heeded by more unionists.

On his request and our attitude to it, may I say that we have entered into an agreement in good faith which we believe will bring benefit to all the people of Northern Ireland. If he is saying, for example, that we should suspend the discussion on improving cross-border security and the many steps that are being taken to make a more effective counter attack against terrorism, I think that that is a difficult proposition to make, but I note his comments.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): Has the Secretary of State read the excellent analysis in *The Irish Times* today of the serious position developing in Northern Ireland by the former Cabinet colleague of the Taoiseach, Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien? Does he agree with Dr. O'Brien's analysis that the Government rule in Northern Ireland without consent? Does he also agree that the Anglo-Irish agreement can be maintained only "by massive and sustained use of force"?

Since the Secretary of State has rightly said that the RUC was extended yesterday, and since it is improper to use 8,000 RUC men to impose the Anglo-Irish agreement on 1 million free citizens in Northern Ireland, what additional forces does the Secretary of State intend to use?

Mr. King: May I say before answering the hon. Gentleman how pleased I am to see him here. I hope that he will persuade some of his colleagues that, rather than on the streets of Belfast and around barricades in the Province, the House of Commons is the right place to discuss these matters.

I failed fully to answer the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy). I have not read *The Irish Times* today, but I shall look at it later. It sounds like a similar version of the malign scenario that I think Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien has painted for a considerable time about this matter. I do not accept that view. I believe that there is a more optimistic and hopeful approach to the affairs of Northern Ireland. I regard Dr. O'Brien's approach as the gospel of despair.

There will not be a strain on the RUC if responsible politicians tell the truth about the agreement and if they do not incite their supporters to acts of violence. Some hon. Members, not necessarily in the Official Unionist party but in other parties in Northern Ireland, have not been noticeable for their reticence recently. In that situation there will certainly be an extra strain on the police. I very much hope that we shall see people respect the rule of law and be prepared to talk sensibly about the right way forward.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the prospects for the Anglo-Irish agreement depend in part on the tenor of his responses to yesterday's events? However misguided, disruptive and violent the expressions of the people of Northern Ireland yesterday, the underlying implication was that those people wished to remain part of the United Kingdom. Will my right hon. Friend recognise this sensitivity in statements? Does he agree that what is really needed is sensitive, quiet persistence in carrying through the agreement?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I have made clear again today, and as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear on a number of occasions, we understand the sensitivity of the Unionists about their position in the United Kingdom. We have sought to give not only the clearest assurances about it but our own personal commitment to it. We feel that that should be better recognised than perhaps it is by some.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is it not clear that what the Unionist leaders mean by democracy is having their own way—when they have a communalist vote which gives them the right to do as they please? Is there not another serious political lesson to be learnt? When the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneux) and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) went to No. 10 Downing street, they were the nominal leaders of the Unionists but, by the time they returned to Northern Ireland, they found that they had been replaced and that other people, including the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), were the real leaders of the Unionist party. Is it not a fact that the speeches made in the past few years by the nominal leaders of the Unionist party have aroused something that was always latent and threatening? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it was not a day of protest, as many have said, but, at the very least, a semi-revolt of the most serious proportions? It is no good us pretending that it was not something like that.

Mr. King: It is true that some of the activities of the leaders and other leading members of the parties in the months since the signing of the agreement have raised, quite unjustifiably, the antagonism of people towards the agreement and increased the expectation of what could be

[Mr. King]

achieved by their opposition. I think that some slightly wiser counsels have already broken through. People have recognised, as they have said, that it is not realistic to expect my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to agree to scrap the agreement. The agreement provides within its text for regular and frequent meetings—moreover, for meetings at the request of either party. The request for a suspension is therefore a breach of the agreement as well. Now people understand that the agreement is there. Sensible and constructive discussion must be the way forward.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I recognise the importance of this statement, but I must take into account also the other business before us today. I shall allow questions to continue for a further 10 minutes.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I spent all yesterday with true Loyalists in my constituency? Is he aware that, during that time, many of them expressed their profound dismay and disgust at the way in which other so-called Loyalists were behaving?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is undoubtedly true that those sorts of things do great damage to the reputation of Unionism. I am certainly most anxious to see the way forward by discussion and not by violence and intimidation, which will only damage the Loyalists' own cause.

Mr. Roy Mason (Barnsley, Central): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the vast majority of hon. Members wish him and his ministerial colleagues to remain firm and resolute against the re-emergence of paramilitary Protestant terrorism which we witnessed yesterday afternoon? Is the right hon. Gentleman also aware that, whether Members of Parliament are in favour of the accord or not, they would not wish him to be diverted from his course or to bow the knee to terrorism in Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: I very much appreciate those remarks, especially coming from the right hon. Gentleman. With his reputation in Northern Ireland for firmness of purpose in these respects, I think that they will be widely noted.

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Unionist leaders would elicit far more sympathy from the rest of the United Kingdom if they participated more in aspects of the United Kingdom Parliament other than in just Northern Ireland affairs? What would happen if the Scots did this?

We would feel isolated and different I think that is why the Unionist leaders feel isolated and different.

Mr. King: This is one of the matters which we hoped we would be able to discuss and which we put forward in the proposals by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It is true that one of the criticisms being made of the Unionists against the Government is that they are excluded from consultation and involvement in community affairs. The truth is that the Unionists are excluding themselves. They are absenting themselves from councils. They are not carrying out their proper duties in the Assembly of scrutinising the work of Northern Ireland departments.

They complain about being excluded and, to cap it all, they absent themselves from this sovereign House of Commons of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the British and Irish Governments, as the Governments of two sovereign states, have a joint interest in protecting the civil rights of the people of Northern Ireland and in enabling the two cultures to co-exist in Northern Ireland? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, if only for that reason, it is vital that no minority group exercises a veto over the democratically agreed policies of those two elected Governments?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman talks about joint interest. I should like to make it clear in case there is any misunderstanding that we have a clear responsibility, but we recognise the interest of the Irish Republic in matters affecting the nationalist community in the North. It must be clearly understood that there has never been in this agreement any question of joint authority. That is one of the lies told in some of the propaganda.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that all Unionists either should or do condemn the violence and intimidation yesterday? Was that violence and intimidation not entirely predictable and, indeed, predicted? Is that violence likely to recur when the marching season starts? Will my right hon. Friend state in clear terms the offer to the Unionist leaders in terms of talks? Are those talks to be open-ended, without strings and with no options closed? If not, my right hon. Friend is wasting his time.

Mr. King: On the first point, if my hon. Friend is right and such violence was predictable, a heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of those who called the day of protest. On talks, it was made clear by the two Unionist leaders that, if they entered into any discussion, it would not imply in any way acceptance of or agreement with the Anglo-Irish agreement and that they would wish to conduct the talks outside the ambit of any Anglo-Irish agreement. We understood that position. We made it absolutely clear that the talks on the matters discussed or on any other matters that they wished to raise could go ahead.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Does the Secretary of State still believe that the so-called Anglo-Irish agreement will help to bring about peace in Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: Yes, I do.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Will my right hon. Friend elucidate on his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter)? How are these talks to take place in the context in which there could be a constructive dialogue outside the Anglo-Irish agreement if that agreement is to stay in place?

Mr. King: I hope that my hon. Friend has seen a copy of the statement that was issued after the meeting that the Prime Minister and I had with the Unionist leaders. If he studies the statement he will see that various proposals were made. There is obviously a wide gulf and there is obviously total disagreement. Instead of harping continually on that, the intelligent way forward is to see whether there are areas upon which there can be agreement—not to concentrate upon the areas where there is disagreement.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Is the Secretary of State aware that the Unionists of Northern Ireland have always threatened violence in this way? That is how Ireland came to be partitioned. That is why there was such injustice and discrimination under Stormont. That is why Sunningdale failed. That is why Northern Ireland is the mess that it is. Always until now they have succeeded in that threat. Only if the British Government stand up to them and start to move forward can we begin to get peace in Northern Ireland.

Mr. King: One of the saddest aspects of yesterday is that many people will get the impression that the majority community in Northern Ireland are like that, when in fact the vast majority of Unionists are looking for a peaceful, prosperous and happy Province in which to live. They deserve a leadership that could look objectively at new proposals to see whether we can find a better way to go forward rather than the stalemate and the sadness of the last 12 or 14 years.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): What kind of Loyalist puts on a hood and stands at a barricade? What are they loyal to? Is not the fact that they behave in that way doing tremendous harm to the instinctive support of the British people for the maintenance of the Union?

Mr. King: I find myself unable to answer my hon. Friend's question, because they were not even loyal to the protests in which they were supposed to be involved. As many hon. Members have said, nothing more destroyed the impact that that protest might have had than the visible intimidation, with the clear inference that if people were not going to work there were many other factors, except voluntary reasons, for not being there.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Were not yesterday's events, or something like them, foreseeable and foreseen with foreboding, and predictable and predicted by some of us who, with sorrow, went into the Lobby against the Anglo-Irish agreement? May I repeat the question that I put to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and my own Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, in 1969? Charles I, Sir Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, Cromwell, Peel, Gladstone, Lloyd George and, in our own time, other well-meaning politicians from this side of the water—who of them have had any success in Ireland? Is not the real problem us?

I make no criticism of the men of the British Army, but if there is what is seen as an English Army in Ireland, what else can we expect? Without being frivolous about it, because it is a very unfrivolous subject, if they can get behind Barry McGuigan, and if they can get behind the Northern Ireland football team, by some alchemy, will not the residents of Ireland solve this problem? We ought to recognise that there is nothing we can do from this side of the water.

Mr. King: It would take more than a supplementary answer to respond to the hon. Member and to the many points that he has raised. I simply believe that the inferences behind his question are quite unacceptable.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my right hon. Friend agree that, much as the Parliament of the United Kingdom remains committed to the Union so long as the majority in Northern Ireland so wish, it has to be said that those who wrap themselves in

the flag of the Union to frustrate the Parliament of the Union and who destroy the consent upon which the Union is based put the Union at risk and no one else?

Mr. King: I have made absolutely clear, and I do so again, my belief in and my commitment to the Union of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. All I would say is that some of the events of yesterday, and other events as well — as when other people try occasionally to hit me over the head with a Union Jack wrapped in an iron bar—put some strain on that loyalty.

Mr. Robert MacLennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The Secretary of State has called attention to the fact that a number of hon. Members were making common cause yesterday with men at the barricades. If he is alleging that those hon. Members were in some way responsible directly for the violence in which they were participating, will he say who they were—because that role is not conformable with membership of this House — and ensure that they do not participate in the wider discussions that he must have with the Unionist community to ensure that their continuing anxieties are met?

Mr. King: The hon. Member may or may not have seen some of the television coverage of yesterday's events. He will have seen a number of people in paramilitary dress. I referred to the fact that Members of this House were making common cause. I noted the distinction that was made by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) in his by-election when a group of people in paramilitary dress arrived. My understanding is that the right hon. Gentleman very properly said that he would have nothing to do with them and they were invited immediately to leave that by-election rally. I wish that I had seen some of that same approach yesterday.

Mr. K. Harvey Proctor (Billericay): Is it not most unfair to blame my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneux) for the current position in Ulster when in August of last year he warned that the denial of equal British rights to Ulster would seriously destabilise the Province, especially in the light of the comments yesterday of Mr. T. E. Uteley in the *Daily Telegraph* who described the Hillsborough agreement as not being about equality and said that "it is a frigid lie to pretend that it is."

Mr. King: I totally reject the fact that any citizen of Northern Ireland does not have equal rights with others in the United Kingdom. One of the rights that people enjoy in the United Kingdom is representation in this House. I just happen to notice that that right is being denied to them at the present time by no will of the Government.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Secretary of State confirm that if there is such a phrase as "no surrender" it relates to the attitude of this House and that the Anglo-Irish agreement still stands and will be acted upon? If there is a phrase in common parlance—"not an inch"—it is a phrase to be adopted by this House: that the gains of the Anglo-Irish agreement both to the Unionist and to the nationalist community will not be surrendered, not by an inch and not by an iota. Will the Secretary of State confirm that last week's offer of round table talks is still on the table?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I confirm that intimidation or threats are no way to approach this House of Commons or this Government. That is a very

[Mr. King]

counter-productive approach. Nor would there be any case to use it if it were suggested that there is no other approach, because the offer of talks and the agreement that we should meet again to review the suggestions that we made stands. Even more after yesterday I very much hope that people will realise that that is the sensible way to proceed. For elected Members in the United Kingdom, wherever they come from, faced with serious issues in their constituencies, to refuse to meet and talk with Ministers and with the Prime Minister and discuss these issues is a deplorable lack of responsibility at a very important time.

Later—

Mr. Gow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in answer to a question which followed his statement, unwittingly misled the House. Can you give him an opportunity to correct the wrong impression which he gave? My right hon. Friend said that the rights of the Queen's subjects who live in Northern Ireland are the same as the rights of the Queen's subjects who live in Great Britain. My right hon. Friend will acknowledge that the passing of legislation for Northern Ireland is done by Order in Council, whereas for the rest of the kingdom it is done by ordinary Bills. Secondly, there is no—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That seems to be a continuation of the statement. I have already said that we have a very heavy day in front of us. We cannot continue the debate in that way.

Immigration Rules

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise with you a point of order concerning the behaviour of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), of which I have given you notice. Indeed, I have given notice of it to the hon. Member. I ask you whether it is in order for an hon. Member to write a letter on a matter relating to the immigration rules that libels another hon. Member. I refer to a letter which was sent in February by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden to a firm of solicitors, in which she enclosed a copy of a letter which the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. and learned Member for Ribbles Valley (Mr. Waddington) sent to me. In that letter she appears to say that new regulations are being prepared, of which the House has no knowledge, by the Minister of State, Home Office. The hon. Lady said in her letter:

"I wonder if you are aware that"—

the Minister of State—

"is working towards the introduction of new regulations which will prevent MPs such as"—

myself—

"exercising an open market in allowing people, such as"—

Mr. X—

"from coming into this country with illegal passports."

The hon. Lady claimed that

"about 20 Labour MPs . . . operated a system over the Christmas holiday period of inviting people to come to them on the completely wrong information that their own Member of Parliament is not available."

The hon. Lady explained how she spent two days during the Christmas period not answering the phone—

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman is putting a point of order to me, he must not recite from letters.

Mr. Corbyn: I am sure you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is important that I explain why I am putting the point. I shall be brief. The final point in the hon. Lady's letter is:

"I am sure you will appreciate that this does not endear the system to people, like myself, who work exceedingly hard on behalf of genuine cases, many of whom are resident and very supportive of the Conservative Party."

First, Mr. Speaker, is it in order for an hon. Member to write libellous comments about another hon. Member and, indeed, about a group of hon. Members? Secondly, as the Member concerned is a Minister in the Government, she appears to have information, which is not available to the House about the true purpose of the draft regulations which the Minister of State, Home Office has raised. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether it would be in order for both the hon. Lady and the Minister of State to come to the House and make statements about the true nature of the regulations which the Home Office is trying to introduce.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot be asked to adjudicate on letters which pass between hon. Members and their constituents. This is a matter between the hon. Lady and her constituent. If the hon. Gentleman is alleging that it is a breach of privilege, that is a different matter and he should write to me about it.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend has given me a copy of the letter. It goes a good deal wider than the hon. Lady's disgraceful personal allegations

CONFIDENTIAL

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

CC B/ln
RC



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

WHITEHALL

LONDON SW1A 2AZ

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street
London
SW1

CDP
S/S

4th March 1986

Statement Proposed
by Northern Ireland Office

Dear Charles,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR KILFEDDER

I am now able to let you have a draft statement for discussion at, and with luck, publication after the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr Kilfedder tomorrow.

As you will see, it follows closely the statement issued after the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley, and is compatible with the briefing with which we have already supplied you. In particular, it reflects our hope that Mr Kilfedder will try and persuade his Unionist colleagues to reopen the dialogue with the Prime Minister. But it also now seeks to have Mr Kilfedder publicly disassociate himself from yesterday's excesses in Northern Ireland. No radical changes to the briefing already supplied seem, however, to be necessary. The Secretary of State has not yet had a chance to see this. If he has any comments we will telephone them through to you.

A copy of this letter goes to Michael Stark and Len Appleyard.

Yours Sincerely
Neil Ward.

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STATEMENT ISSUED FOLLOWING THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH
MR KILFEDDER MP ON 5 MARCH 1986

and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

1. The Prime Minister had a meeting today with Mr Kilfedder of the Ulster Popular Unionist Party.

2. The Prime Minister told Mr Kilfedder that the Government was well aware of the strength of feeling among many Unionists about aspects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement which had underlain the strike on 3 March which she deplored. But both agreed that further strikes like that on 3 March would be extremely damaging for Northern Ireland, not least for employment prospects. The Prime Minister explained that the Government would not be deterred by such tactics from implementing the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and expressed the hope that the Unionist leaders would take up the offer of dialogue and reject a course which could only harm all the people of the Province and weaken support for the Union in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister and Mr Kilfedder condemned unreservedly the violent incidents and intimidation which have occurred on 3 March.

repeated

3. The PM / again to Mr Kilfedder the points which she had put to Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley. While reaffirming the Government's commitment to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, she made it clear that the Government remained willing to establish new arrangements for enabling unionists to make their views known to the Government on affairs in Northern Ireland. The Government would still welcome discussion with Unionist leaders of the form that such arrangements might take. The Prime Minister also made clear that the offer of consultations with the Unionist leaders about the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly and about the arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business in Parliament at Westminster remained on the table. The Prime Minister assured Mr Kilfedder that the Government would like the Assembly to continue. But it would have to play a useful role in Northern Ireland.

4. The PM recalled that she had agreed to consider positively a suggestion by Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley that the Government should call a Round Table conference to discuss devolution in Northern Ireland; and that the Government remained willing to consider any system of devolution commanding widespread acceptance in Northern Ireland. The PM also recalled that if the various ideas bore fruit consideration would have to be given to what that meant for the work of the Intergovernmental Conference.

5. Mr Kilfedder indicated that he would consider these points on behalf of his own party [and would meet the Prime Minister again soon]. He also undertook to relay to the other Unionist party leaders the Prime Minister's continuing offer of further discussion.

STATEMENT 4 MARCH 1986

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the events in Northern Ireland yesterday.

2. As the House will be aware, the leaders of the two main Unionists parties had called for a day of action and protest. They invited everybody to stay away from work and stated that it was to be a passive and voluntary demonstration and that there should be no roadblocks or intimidation of those going to work.

3. In the event, there was widespread obstruction, intimidation and some violence during the day culminating in serious disorder in East and North Belfast last night. The first incidents occurred before midnight on Sunday and disturbances continued until the early hours of this morning.

4. In spite of these difficulties a very considerable number of people succeeded in getting to work; particularly in the commercial offices and public services, but ^{many} ~~the main~~ factories were seriously affected.

5. I pay tribute to the determination of all those who refused to be intimidated and exercised their right to go to work. I also pay tribute to the men of the security forces and particularly the RUC for all the work that they did to seek to keep roads open for people to be able to get to work. However there have also been a number of complaints when it is alleged that the police did not take action when it was required. The Chief Constable is preparing a full

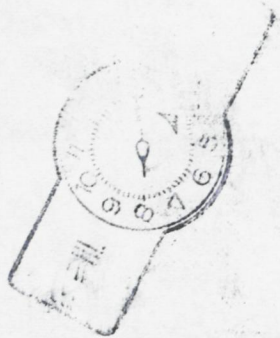
a full report on all the policing aspects of the past 24 hours. To give the House some indication of the scale of the workload that the RUC faced, on the latest information available there were some 655 roadblocks in the Province over the period of which 441 were cleared. There were in addition some 80 cavalcades and demonstrations, which caused considerable disruption in a number of towns mainly around midday. There were 57 arrests and the names of 184 people noted to proceed by way of summons. 65 Plastic Baton Rounds were fired, 47 policemen were injured. Last night there were a number of petrol bombs thrown, and there were over 20 shots fired in 3 firearms attacks on the police during the disturbances in the Loyalist areas.

6. The figures listed above give the details of a tragic day for Northern Ireland. Many Members will have seen some of the disgraceful incidents on television last night. These pictures have been shown all over the world and will do great damage to the reputation of the Province. The House will also have seen elected members of this House making common cause with people in paramilitary dress.

7. The Government is well aware of the strength of feeling among many Unionists about aspects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The House will be aware that My Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister and I met the Right Honourable Member for Lagan Valley and the Member for North Antrim last Tuesday. During a long meeting My Right Honourable Friend put forward a number of proposals to help meet their main concerns and agreed to consider positively their suggestions that the Government should call Round Table Conference to discuss devolution in Northern Ireland; it was

agreed that we would all reflect on the various suggestions that had been made and would meet again shortly. The prospects of constructive discussions instead of confrontation were greeted with widespread relief in the Province, only for that to be destroyed by their abrupt repudiation of this course following a meeting in Belfast late that night. They then decided to proceed with the day of protest.

8. The whole country can now see how tragic and totally counterproductive yesterday's action has been. It is now urgent that the Unionists leaders recognise again that the only way in which the concerns of those they seek to represent can be addressed is by constructive discussion and not by threats and violence. The degree of intimidation evident yesterday showed how little confidence many of the organisers had in being able peacefully to persuade their fellow citizens to join their day of protest. I make it quite clear that this Government, this Parliament will not be intimidated either by the sort of violent actions that took place yesterday. I believe that an increasing number of Unionists while disliking many aspects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement wish to look for a constructive way forward. The Government has made quite clear our willingness to sit down and discuss seriously the Unionists concerns. In our Parliamentary democracy, in this United Kingdom, that can be the only way.



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keep one copy on file

STATEMENT ISSUED FOLLOWING THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH
MR. KILFEDDER, MP, ON 5 MARCH 1986

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The Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Secretary had a meeting today with Mr. Kilfedder of the Ulster Popular Unionist Party.

Mr. Kilfedder condemned unreservedly the violent incidents and intimidation which have occurred on 3 March. He and the Prime Minister agreed that further strikes like that on 3 March would be extremely damaging for Northern Ireland, both for its standing in the eyes of other countries and for employment prospects.

The Prime Minister explained that the Government would not be deterred by such tactics from implementing the Anglo-Irish Agreement. She expressed the hope that the Unionist leaders would take up the offer of dialogue which she had made to Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley at their meeting on 25 February covering new arrangements for Unionists to make their views known to the Government on affairs in Northern Ireland, the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly and arrangements for handling Northern Ireland issues at Westminster. The Prime Minister assured Mr. Kilfedder that the Government would like the Assembly to continue. But it would have to play a useful role in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister made clear that her offer to consider positively a suggestion by Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley that the Government should call a Round Table conference to discuss devolution in Northern Ireland remained on the table.

Mr. Kilfedder indicated that he would consider these points on behalf of his own party. He also undertook to relay to the other Unionist party leaders the Prime Minister's continuing offer of further discussion.

E.R.

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