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10 DOWNING STREET

6 March 1986

From the Private Secretary

Dear Jim,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR. CUSHNAHAN

The Prime Minister had a meeting this evening with Mr. John Cushnahan, Leader of the Alliance Party in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Secretary was also present.

Mr. Cushnahan said that he fully endorsed the Government's policy. They must hold firm to the Anglo-Irish agreement but at the same time offer a lifeline to the Unionists, particularly the Official Unionists. He thought that the Northern Ireland Secretary had handled matters since the strike with very great skill. He hoped that the Prime Minister would confirm that her offer to the two main Unionist parties on 25 February remained on the table. It was important to keep emphasising this and to put the onus for rejecting talks on the Unionist parties. He also thought that the Prime Minister should go ahead and call a round table conference on devolution, even without the prior agreement of the Unionist parties to attend. The Unionists would be under pressure to turn up; and at the conference the SDLP would be under pressure to show whether they were seriously prepared to move towards devolution on an acceptable basis. The Prime Minister said that this last point needed careful thought. She could only play the round table conference card once and it would be important to get the timing right.

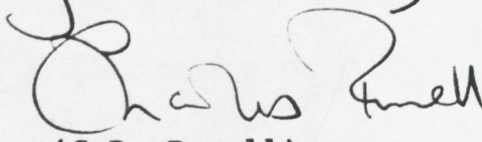
Mr. Cushnahan expressed unease about the conduct of the RUC during the day of action on 3 March. This had done damage to the RUC's reputation which might well be further increased by the leaking of tape recording of a Police Federation meeting in Northern Ireland at which strong criticism of the Anglo-Irish agreement was expressed and applauded. This would make it much harder to persuade the minority to support the security forces. The Northern Ireland Secretary said that he had called for a full report into the RUC's handling of the day of action.

Mr. Cushnahan said that he had a number of suggestions to offer on the handling of the Intergovernmental Conference. He thought that the Government should insist that only issues of policy were dealt with in the IGC. The Republic should not be allowed to raise trivial matters. It

would help to secure acceptance of the Agreement in the North if more stress could be placed on social and economic co-operation through the IGC. It would also help if a few occasions could be found for the Government to say no to proposals put forward by the Republic. The agenda for meetings of the IGC should be published, to dispel secrecy surrounding it. The Government might also discuss the agenda in advance with the Northern Ireland political parties. The Prime Minister undertook to consider these suggestions.

The attached statement to the press was agreed with Mr. Cushnahan at the end of the meeting and has subsequently been released by the No. 10 Press Office. Mr. Cushnahan said that, in commenting on his meeting with the Prime Minister, he would say he had found her firm in her determination to implement the agreement but also more than anxious to allay the fears of the Unionist community. The proposals which she had put to the Unionist parties still stood and she was willing to discuss them at any time.

I am copying this letter to Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office), Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Stephen Boys Smith (Home Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

(C.D. Powell)

Jim Daniell, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR. CUSHNAHAN

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland today met Mr. Cushnahan, Leader of the Alliance Party.

Mr. Cushnahan confirmed his Party's view that the Agreement should be given a chance by all sections of the community in Northern Ireland to achieve its objectives.

Both the Prime Minister and Mr. Cushnahan condemned the violence and intimidation that had accompanied the day of action and protest on 3 March. They expressed concern at the damage that had been caused within Northern Ireland itself by the strike, and equally importantly the harm to potential foreign investment and to the image of Northern Ireland abroad.

The Prime Minister confirmed to Mr. Cushnahan that the offer which she had made to the Unionist Party leaders on 25 February still stood and indicated her willingness to resume discussions on that basis at any time. Mr. Cushnahan welcomed this.

The Prime Minister stated that the Government remained ready to consider positively the suggestion by the UUP and DUP of a round table conference on devolution. Mr. Cushnahan expressed his Party's willingness to participate, especially as he had made similar proposals previously.