

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Exchange of Letters with Dr. Paisley

Your minute of 3 April enclosed a draft reply from Mr. Patten to Mr Peter Robinson, M.P.

The Prime Minister has approved this.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'C.P.' with a flourish.

Charles Powell

4 April 1985

CC Mr Ward (NIO)  
Mr Budd (FCO)

Ref. A085/1038

MR. POWELL

Exchange of Letters with Dr Paisley

Prime Minister  
Agree proposed  
reply from  
Mr. Patten?

You commented in your letter of 28 March to Mr Ward (Northern Ireland Office) on the draft reply to Dr Paisley.

CDD  
3/4.

2. Mr Patten replied on 28 March.

3. Mr Peter Robinson MP has now returned to the charge in a second letter to Mr Patten a copy of which I attach.

4. It is proposed that Mr Patten should reply as in the draft attached.

5. We cannot give Mr Robinson the assurances he seeks in precisely the terms he requests; but the Northern Ireland Office is conscious that, unless we can go some way to meet the DUP there is a risk that they will not participate in further talks on devolution and that they may try to turn the Government's 'failure' to give the assurances into an election issue on the basis that only the DUP can be trusted to resist the betrayal of Northern Ireland.

6. The attached draft, prepared with this in mind, has been agreed in discussions between Mr Andrew and me. Mr Patten would like to reply before Easter and for the sake of speed I am, with the agreement of the Northern Ireland Office submitting this to you direct for the Prime Minister's approval of the draft.

RTA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

3 April 1985





PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS,  
STORMONT,  
BELFAST BT4 3SY

Chris Patten Esq., M.P.,  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Stormont Castle  
Stormont  
BELFAST.

1st April, 1985.

Dear Minister,

I am in receipt of your communication of 26th March. I know you are aware of our desire to see progress towards political stability in Northern Ireland and therefore our wish to have dialogue that may assist in achieving this. Nonetheless it is vital to the prospect for success in such talks that Ulster Parties are clear whether the talks in which we have been invited to engage are to find an internal structure wholly within the U.K. or a structure over and along side which a foreign Government might have a say.

I must frankly say that your reply fails to satisfactorily answer the questions which we asked. I will therefore repeat them again as we cannot proceed without clear and acceptable answers.

Firstly, we asked you if "the talks you wish to engage us in are solely internal to Northern Ireland and are not in any sense part of a three-way process with Dublin".

Your reply that the talks which you are undertaking are internal to Northern Ireland does not answer whether or not these talks are "in any sense part of a three-way process with Dublin". That is a key consideration in relation to these projected talks. We therefore would be obliged to receive an unambiguous and forthright answer.

Secondly, in regard to undenied speculation that H.M.G. is presently negotiating with the Dublin Government future arrangements of government within Northern Ireland, you totally avoided our request for "an unequivocal assurance in writing that no such negotiations are taking place with the Dublin Government concerning the future Government of Northern Ireland". We regard this failure on your behalf as tellingly significant. If the Government cannot plainly tell the people of Northern Ireland that their internal arrangements of Government are not being negotiated with Dublin then you need not expect us to play a part in that nefarious process by talking to you. Surely the Government at least owes Ulster's politicians and people candour and open declaration of policy. We can only draw our own conclusions from the Government's failure to face up to this challenge.



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STORMONT,  
BELFAST BT4 3SY

Contd....

We are being forced to conclude that the Government is engaged in negotiating with Dublin over the heads of the people of Northern Ireland and as this is a policy of betrayal of the British people of Northern Ireland we will have no part nor lot in the intrigue.

The choice is the Government's dialogue or collision with the Ulster people. The Government's present attitude sadly indicates a deliberate choice of collision. If you can yet satisfactorily respond on this matter then we stand ready and willing to do business with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter D. Robinson".

PETER D. ROBINSON, M.P.



DRAFT LETTER FROM MR PATTEN TO MR ROBINSON

Thank you for your letter of 1 April. I had hoped that my earlier letter would have made matters clear.

On your first point, the talks that Douglas Hurd has asked me to conduct with you are clearly and exclusively about the internal structures and administration of Northern Ireland and the role that the Northern Ireland parties have in them. We envisage internal structures and administrations for a devolved Government which would involve only Her Majesty's Government and representatives of the Northern Ireland parties. We have no wish to seek to involve the Irish Government in the talks we have with you and the other parties. We have no intention of trying to bring you into a "three-way process with Dublin".

Secondly, as the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have made clear, talks with the Irish Government are taking place on the basis set out in the communique issued after the Chequers meeting of November 1984. It is not possible to predict what the outcome of the talks will be.

But I can assure you that they will not call in question the constitutional position that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and will remain so for as long as that is the will of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Her Majesty's Government and the Parliament of the United Kingdom have sovereign responsibility for the governmental arrangements in Northern Ireland. That is the position to which Her Majesty's Government is unequivocally committed in all aspects of its dealings in relation to Northern Ireland, and (as I say) whatever the outcome of the talks with the Irish Government it will not change that position.

We continue to believe that any new arrangements for devolved government in Northern Ireland must be widely acceptable throughout the community there, and it is therefore to the constitutional political parties in the Province that we must look in our efforts to determine what any new devolved structures might be. That is why Dougl's Hurd asked me to embark on careful and detailed discussions on internal structures with you and the other constitutional parties. We believe it is in the interests of everyone in



Northern Ireland to identify acceptable new arrangements. I hope you will agree that we can now get on with that task.

Once again, I have of course consulted Douglas Hurd before writing this letter.

*Agreed*

*ms*



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1/4.

70 WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AS

01-233 8319

*From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service*

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A085/993

1 April 1985

*Dear Neil,*

Exchange of letters with Dr Paisley

*pp's att.*

Sir Robert Armstrong has seen a copy of Charles Powell's letter of 28 March about the reply to Dr Paisley.

He wonders whether the relevant sentence could be altered to read:

"I can readily confirm that the purpose of the talks which I shall be conducting is to discover the extent of possible agreement among the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland about the possibility of progress towards a measure of devolution of responsibility for Government in Northern Ireland from Her Majesty's Government to institutions comprising duly elected representatives of these parties, on a basis which would command a wide measure of acceptance in Northern Ireland."

I am sending copies of this letter to Charles Powell and Colin Budd.

(R P Hatfield)  
Private Secretary

N D Ward Esq