



PM/86/033

PRIME MINISTER

CCP  
CCB/VP  
Prime Minister

Mr  
I have fixed a meeting for 15 June (the first day we can get everyone together)

CCP  
30/5

The Northern Ireland Assembly

1. In his recent undated minute to you, Tom King makes a very strong case for dissolving the Northern Ireland Assembly without further delay. I can see that the disadvantages of allowing the Assembly to continue functioning in its present form quite probably outweigh the undoubted disadvantages of removing the main constitutional outlet (outside Westminster) for locally elected Northern Ireland politicians to express their views; and that, if we decide to act on that conclusion, then for the reasons Tom King gives, it probably makes sense to get the decision and the parliamentary debate on it out of the way before the main Northern Ireland marching season starts.

2. At the same time, I am somewhat concerned that, however carefully we present it, the decision will be seen as an essentially negative one, and could easily be taken as signalling that our Northern Ireland policies have run into a cul de sac. I therefore think that we need to weigh it in the light of our broad strategy for Northern Ireland, including on the one hand the possibility of drawing the unionists into talks about talks and on the other hand the need to maintain and strengthen nationalist support for the Agreement. In this latter connection it will be important to continue to carry the Irish Government with us.

3. I note Tom King's judgement that the unionists will not be prepared to start talking to us until the marching season is over. But that makes it all the more important that the Government's posture during the marching season should be clearly seen to be a positive and constructive one.



4. The way the situation in Northern Ireland develops over the coming months could be crucial to the Government's electoral standing. I am therefore glad that we shall have the opportunity on 11 June to meet you, to review the situation in the Province and to hear from Tom King how he sees the way forward between now and the end of the year, before we go ahead with a decision to dissolve the Assembly.

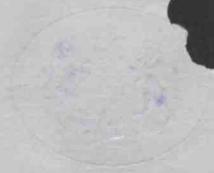
5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal, the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Defence, and the Home Department, the Chief Whip and the Cabinet Secretary.

*Robert Curran* (Private Secretary)

*GH* (GEOFFREY HOWE)

.. (Approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
29 May 1986



*Faint, illegible handwriting in blue ink.*