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PM



bc PC

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Private Secretary*

30 March 1990

*Dear Stephen,*

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister has read with interest your Secretary of State's minute of 28 March, setting out the way in which he proposes to continue his efforts to draw the parties in Northern Ireland into discussion on a form of devolved government. The Prime Minister agrees that Mr. Brooke should proceed in the way proposed in his minute and would herself be ready to raise the matter with Mr. Haughey on 20 April if no satisfactory progress has been made by then.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Lord President, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Attorney General and Sir Robin Butler.

*Yours sincerely,*

C. D. POWELL

Stephen Leach, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.

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Prime Minister

PRIME MINISTER

Agree if necessary  
to raise this with

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

by Taoiseach on

In my minute of 22 February I said that there seemed to be a significant degree of flexibility in the positions of the Unionist parties and the SDLP, even if this did not always come out in public, but also considerable caution about exposing their hand too soon. I also said that I felt both Governments had largely met the first of the Unionist "preconditions" (willingness to contemplate an alternative Agreement), and that it might be possible to go some way towards providing a graceful exit for them on their second and third "preconditions" (temporary non-operation of the Agreement and reduction in the role of the Secretariat). Finally, I noted that the Irish were rather nervous about the way things were developing, and in particular were sceptical about the Unionist commitment to meaningful dialogue; and concerned that the format of any talks should reflect their view of the significance of the Irish dimension, and of their own role in such talks.

20 Apr 7?

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2. Things have now progressed to a sensitive stage and I believe the next month will be decisive in determining how much further we can proceed, and whether we should conclude that the advances already made - in terms, for example, of improved relations with the Unionists - represent as much as we can at present achieve.

3. I remain convinced, although the difficulties remain real, that there is scope for progress which we should exploit. Constructive political development in Northern Ireland would be a significant prize for us - first, in political terms; second (through marginalising the IRA) for security reasons; third, in contributing generally to social stability; and fourth, in its probable consequences for the Northern Ireland economy. Even if

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the ultimate prize of an agreement among the Northern Ireland parties on a form of devolved government for Northern Ireland eludes us for the present, as has always been more likely than not, I propose accordingly to continue my efforts, though with caution and without drama. At my last meeting with the Unionist leaders on 15 March, it came across clearly that they were open to the suggestion that their first "precondition" was more important than the other two, and they seemed anxious not to say anything which would preclude further meetings. It was in itself reassuring that they felt able to discuss with me the recent Irish Supreme Court judgement in the McGimpsey Case (a Unionist challenge to the constitutionality of the Anglo-Irish Agreement which produced a hardline reaffirmation by the Court of the Irish claim to Northern Ireland) and the release, again by the Irish Supreme Court, of two Maze escapers we had been trying to extradite. Since then Mr Molyneaux has made an extremely negative-sounding speech, arguing that there was no prospect of an agreement between Unionists and nationalists while the Irish Constitutional claim to Northern Ireland remained in place. This was well received by a hardline audience. However, he was careful not to introduce any new obstacles to talks between the parties and ensured that this fact was brought to my attention. The DUP leadership is consistently and publicly anxious to keep open the prospects for dialogue.

4. I have had no further meetings with the SDLP, but, in private discussions with officials and with Richard Needham (with whom he was working in the United States to encourage inward investment), Mr Hume has been relatively forthcoming on the sort of institutions he would envisage in any settlement. Mr Hume clearly shares some of the Taoiseach's doubts about the wisdom of seeking to promote dialogue now but I believe he genuinely sees the need (which Mr Haughey refuses to accept) for political development within Northern Ireland, and for a form of devolution there. If the SDLP can be brought to focus on the reality of

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dialogue, there is a good chance that they would be willing to play a constructive role.

5. Unfortunately, however, I have not been able to make as much progress with the Irish as I would have hoped. The nature of the Unionist preconditions means that we need Irish goodwill if we are to pave the way for interparty talks in Northern Ireland and their active commitment if the talks do in fact follow the broad agenda which seems likely. However, at the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) meeting on 2 March, Mr Collins was still expressing concern about the impact of talks on the Agreement, about the format of such talks, and about the boost any breakdown in talks could give to the Provisional IRA. I sought to reassure him on these points - the last is a reversal of the true position; but Irish nervousness was even more evident at a subsequent meeting at official level, where my officials tabled some papers designed to deal with Mr Collins' concerns in more detail. The response from the Irish side was half-hearted, and they seemed to be reflecting Mr Haughey's lack of enthusiasm for pursuing these ideas at the present time. They may be trying to keep alive Mr Haughey's hope of attracting the Unionists to Dublin, ultimately to participate in a conference he would chair. However, I believe the Irish now understand my position, and following the meeting of officials I wrote to Mr Collins on 12 March (I enclose a copy of my letter) asking for a meeting to discuss the issues further. As our Ambassador has advised that we are only likely to get a positive response if the Taoiseach is personally involved, I have also sought to make arrangements to see Mr Haughey in the margins. As I have explained, we need something more positive from the Irish than acquiescence. Mr Haughey is probably antipathetic to what we have in mind. If we are to bring him round it will require a combination of persuasion and continued pressure, in which we probably all have a part to play.

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6. My approach to Irish Ministers will be that, by virtue of Article 4 of the Agreement (reaffirmed in last year's Review), the Irish Government is committed to supporting our efforts towards devolution and to point out that a general political accommodation would be in Irish interests, given that all concerned now accept the need for talks to be broadened at an appropriate stage to embrace the relationship between the Irish authorities and any new administration which may be established in Northern Ireland. I shall try to convince the Irish that their suspicions of Unionist intentions are misplaced but that in any event their position is fully safeguarded: in particular because the question of amending or replacing the present Agreement will only arise if both Governments believe it appropriate in the context of a new and wider settlement. I shall seek to appeal to Mr Haughey's self-image as the guardian of Irish nationalism and the one man capable of reaching an historic accommodation with Unionism (albeit on terms he is reluctant to accept). I shall also point out that the recent Supreme Court judgements have placed some strain on the fabric of the Agreement, and that we are concerned to see the Irish living up to the spirit in which we signed the Agreement, on extradition, security co-operation, the constitutional position and political development towards devolution.

7. It is not easy to predict Mr Haughey's reaction. He is committed to the idea of a united Ireland, and finds the idea of separate political development in Northern Ireland hard to take. But he is a pragmatist and would like to be credited with palpable progress in the North, and he may be susceptible to the argument that Unionists will only be prepared to discuss North-South relations with him once some progress has been made towards the establishment of new institutions in Northern Ireland. He may decide not to obstruct the movement towards talks. I have to say, however, that he is perhaps more likely to seek to frustrate our plans, in which case he will probably

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continue to procrastinate, in the hope that unionists will make the mistake of themselves closing the door on interparty dialogue.

8. If all goes well, and I am able to reassure Mr Collins and the Taoiseach about the benefits inherent in setting the scene for dialogue, I would hope to be able to make some sort of joint statement on the first Unionist "precondition" on or after the IGC meeting on 19 April, as well as going some way towards providing a form of words which might enable the Unionists to say that their other preconditions had been met. This would then provide a basis for further discussions with the parties with a view to engaging in more formal multilateral talks.

9. On the other hand, if I am unsuccessful in overcoming Irish concerns on that occasion, you may wish to consider taking the matter up when you meet the Taoiseach on 20 April, in preparation for the informal European Council on 28 April. I hope that if it proves necessary you will be able to find time to aim to persuade the Taoiseach to help create the conditions for dialogue to begin, especially since he was himself instrumental in contributing to the current cautiously optimistic climate of political opinion (by his November and January statements). There will be other issues to tax him with, such as those arising from the Supreme Court judgements I have referred to. The Irish may well be preparing to come off the defensive by exploiting the imminent outcome of Mr Stevens' Inquiry into allegations of collusion between members of the Security Forces and Loyalist paramilitaries; and the recent House of Lords decision on the compellability of witnesses in Northern Ireland. However, we would be playing the Irish game if we were distracted from maintaining the pressure on them to support our political strategy in Northern Ireland.

10. To sum up, there are both hopeful and less hopeful aspects about the situation as it now stands. With regard to the

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Northern Ireland parties, we seem to have moved forward slightly: as I have said recently, positions which at an earlier stage appeared dogmatic have in fact been somewhat modified. As against this, the Irish clearly remain concerned that there are too many unknowns in the present equation, and are therefore disposed to take what is in my view an overly cautious, even unhelpful, attitude. As I say, the next month will be crucial in determining whether there is a real prospect of moving towards interparty talks this year and Mr Haughey may hold the key. I will report again after my meeting with the Irish.

11. I am sending copies of this minute to Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd, David Waddington, Tom King and Patrick Mayhew, and to Sir Robin Butler.

P.B.

PB

28 March 1990

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TEXT OF LETTER FROM SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND TO  
IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER, 12 MARCH 1990

Mr Gerard Collins TD  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Iveagh House  
St Stephen's Green  
DUBLIN 1

12 March 1990

I have had a report about the meeting of officials in Dublin on 7 March designed to take forward our conversation on 2 March.

We are at one on the desirability of political progress within Northern Ireland. I am sure that we must now seek to move forward. I believe that the parties most likely to be involved in talks accept the same broad agenda. I also believe that there is a degree of commitment by the unionist leaders to real political dialogue, sufficient at least to be worth testing. There is a basis on which talks could start without any party risking a loss of face or compromise of its principles.

Concern has been expressed about the effect on Sinn Fein if talks break down, but there are also clear signs that the prospect of talks is itself helpfully exerting pressure on them, from which they would be relieved if talks did not materialise. My considered judgment is that we are bound to take the opportunity which now exists to facilitate political progress, since expectations have been encouraged in large part by statements by both our Governments, including the major statements by the Taoiseach in November and January.

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When I next meet the unionist leaders I shall want to give them my considered comment on their three "preconditions". As to the first of these "preconditions" I believe that there is nothing more to be said - the papers my officials gave yours refer to two quotations that seem to me to have already set out the position of our Governments. On the second and third preconditions, there can be no question of suspension, but, as you yourself have suggested, an interval between agreed dates of Conference meetings could be utilised to start talks between the parties; and, while there can be no question of any change in the operation of the Secretariat, the unionists may be able to take comfort from their own argument that, if no Conference meetings are taking place, the Secretariat cannot at that time be serving as a secretariat to the Conference. It is also the case that the British head of the Secretariat would be actively involved in supporting any political exchanges which might be taking place in the interval between the Conferences. As you have pointed out we would need an agreed line to be taken on all this by the two Governments. The unionists would have to be warned not to make excessive claims, and warned also that, if they did, the two Governments would have to rebuff them.

An important issue concerns the scope and format of any talks which take place. The starting point is the need for talks between the parties as envisaged in Article 4 of the Agreement. But, as the proposals on the substance and format of talks which my officials put to yours make clear, it seems likely that all those involved will wish to see a process which also addresses North/South relations and which has implications for East/West relations. There is in short a shared recognition of the need to consider the triple relationship in parallel and this was reflected also in the Taoiseach's statement of 22 January. Clearly your Government must be directly represented in any talks about North/South or East/West relations; and, by virtue of the Agreement, it has the right to put forward views and proposals on the modalities of bringing about devolution in Northern Ireland, insofar as they relate to the interests of the minority community.



In practice I think it probable that each participant in these separate strands will wish to view any emergent package as a whole. Accordingly, no-one will be willing to reach agreement on one aspect without knowing the outcome on the others. Some liaison between the strands will, I agree with you, therefore be needed - but the nature of that liaison must by definition be something to be agreed between all the parties concerned, not just the two Governments. I do not myself rule out the idea of an inter-relationship group, or liaison committee, where all the participants can discuss the emergent pattern as a whole; but I do not think that can be imposed.

I hope that you will now be able to respond positively to the propositions which I have put to you. There has been very full discussion. For my own part, I share entirely the view that there is, as the Taoiseach recently put it, a pressing necessity to create new stable relationships in Northern Ireland and within Ireland as a whole; and I believe that we can, by sensitive handling of the Unionist "preconditions", now help significantly to take matters forward.

Signed:

PB

IRELAND: Situation PPA

