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PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

There is to be a Meeting of Ministers after Cabinet tomorrow to consider the way forward with Northern Ireland.

You have read the papers and there is also a Cabinet Office brief. The only new document is the attached statement by Dr Paisley and Mr Molyneaux. Its precise meaning is not crystal clear, probably deliberately. But it appears to hold out the prospect that the Unionist Parties will withdraw from the House of Commons if the Anglo-Irish Agreement continues to be implemented. It also declares readiness to meet you. You will wish to consider at the meeting: -

- (a) whether the Government should take the initiative in contacting Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley to arrange a meeting or wait for them to make a direct approach;
- (b) how to avoid the risk that they will wish ~~in~~ in their discussions to be exclusively with you and not with the Northern Ireland Secretary; and
- (c) the line which the Government should take with the Unionist leaders if a meeting is held.

There is one further point which I think you might examine with your colleagues. At the moment there is no sort of inter-departmental preparation for meetings of the Inter-Governmental Conference. As a result, no-one else really knows what the Northern Ireland Office are asking of the Irish Government or what they may be ready to concede. Mr. King is naturally very sensitive about retaining control in his own hands. But this is not incompatible with some degree of inter-departmental consultation. I doubt that he would be

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keen on a proper official Committee in the Cabinet Office structure, at least at this stage. But it would, I think, be helpful if your meeting could agree that the briefs for the inter-Governmental Conference should, as a matter of course, be discussed inter-departmentally.

CDP

Charles Powell

29 January 1986

CCPC

JOINT STATEMENT FROM JIM MOLYNEAUX AND IAN PAISLEY.

The Anglo Irish Agreement puts Northern Ireland under a system of government which for all practical purposes is joint authority between London and Dublin.

If the Agreement is permitted to take root then the end of the Union lies ahead.

As the Agreement thus changed the status of Northern Ireland and the Government refused to consult the people of Ulster about these drastic changes in Ulster's constitutional position, all the Unionist Members of Parliament resigned their seats to give the electorate an opportunity to vote for or against the Agreement. Four hundred and nineteen thousand voters said "No". The voting was four to one against the Agreement.

As Members of Parliament we are prepared to play a full part in the campaign to rid Ulster of Dublin interference, but in view of the instability created in Northern Ireland by the Agreement it would be inappropriate to expect the Unionist Members of Parliament to neglect the Province and revert to the normal range of Parliamentary activity which pertained before the Agreement was made.

If the Agreement continues to be implemented, Unionist Members could not in all conscience provide, by normal House of Commons practice, a veneer of democracy to the form of joint authority which the Agreement establishes.

Now that the Prime Minister has indicated a willingness to meet with Unionist leaders, we are prepared to enter into talks with her to ensure that the rights and status of our people may be restored. If she indicates a willingness to consider an alternative to, and a replacement of, the Anglo Irish Agreement, then Unionist co-operation will, as always, be forthcoming.

We shall keep our position in Parliament under review and if circumstances now unforeseen dictate an alteration in strategy we shall decide accordingly.

28.1.1986

