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SECRET

28 November 1985

Various discussions on Anglo-Irish Agreement at Palace Reception-
28 November 1985

Dear Michael

At the annual late night reception at Buckingham Palace tonight I had a number of conversations on the Agreement which it may be of interest to report to you in brief, summary form. I was struck, as indeed I have been since the Agreement was signed, by the spontaneous way in which people with whom I have little or not acquaintance bring it up almost immediately in a conversation as a subject for congratulations. On the other hand it was also evident that Ministers and others "in the know" are rather taken aback and quite concerned at the depth of the Unionist reaction as seen so far.

The Royal Family

On these occasions the Queen, followed by some other members of the Royal Family moves slowly around a series of rooms where diplomatic representatives and others are positioned in accordance with their seniority and she spends a short time in polite conversation with each Ambassador or High Commissioner. At tonight's affair, the Queen, Prince Charles and the Duke and Duchess of Kent each separately brought up the Agreement in conversation; and only Prince Philip and Princess Diana did not do so.

The Queen was clearly interested but stopped just short of saying anything directly approving about the Agreement. I had the impression that she was being careful to be non-committal for obvious reasons. Prince Charles on the other hand was warm and encouraging and made no bones about letting us know that he thought the Agreement was a good thing. He twice said, with evident sincerity, "I shall pray for its success". The Duke of Kent also spoke well of it and the Duchess of Kent even more so. She went on to speak critically of "some of the Ulster Unionists" and mentioned Ian Paisley in particular, saying that "his mouth is bigger than his heart".

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Lord Whitelaw He is clearly a bit shaken, like other Ministers, at the depth of the Unionist reaction and concerned about how to deal with it. He spoke to me of a discussion he had had with Lord Moyola (the former Stormont Prime Minister, Major Chichester Clarke) who had spoken with concern about the Agreement in the House of Lords debate on Tuesday last and who, as Whitelaw put it rather oddly, "is not a Unionist". Whitelaw attributed various concerns to Moyola - in particular the lack of consultation before the Agreement, the choice of Hillsborough as the venue, and the reaction that there would now be from the Unionists if an early meeting of the Conference were to lead to something being done publicly about the UDR or the RUC.

When in further discussion I said I was not answering these points directly to him since they were really not his but Moyola's, Whitelaw said "yes, but they are mine too". At this stage I answered him on each of the points - saying on the consultation question in particular that the whole thrust of the Agreement was, having given a guarantee to the Unionists, to redress the existing imbalances which had always worked against the nationalists. A measure of consultation on the nationalist side made a certain amount of sense therefore it was on that side that the balance had to be redressed. There was not the same need to consult in advance with the Unionists since their position was not under threat in any way; and in any case Paisley and Molyneaux had met twice with Mrs Thatcher in the past few months.

On the choice of Hillsborough for the Summit I said that I thought there would have been criticism no matter where it had taken place. If it had been in the South for example that too would have been called "insensitive".

Whitelaw, as is his style, replied "I couldn't agree with you more". He went on however to say that he himself is very worried at present about where in Belfast the first meeting of the Conference should take place. He found it difficult to think of anywhere suitable - from the security point of view - what would we think of Aldergrove? I said that I understood that the arrangement was that the Ministers would meet in the Secretary of State's Conference room in Stormont; that I thought it right to go ahead with this; that I thought it very likely that we would find Aldergrove unsuitable as too much of a "security" location; and that if, as I understood, the exact date of the first Ministerial Meeting is not announced in advance the security problem should be easier to handle. Again Whitelaw appeared to accept these points - he seemed to have expected that we would find difficulties about a meeting at Aldergrove.

In further discussion I thought it desirable to make the point to Whitelaw (and later to King) that the Unionists politicians are evidently working through a series of graduated steps to build up massive popular support. The game is not over therefore and it is important in this situation that both Governments stand firmly by what has been announced

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and get the merits of the Agreement across to the public. It would be both wrong and in addition dangerous to appear to back away in some way from the Agreement. Whitelaw said he very much agreed with this. He said that he was himself someone who is very deeply committed to making the Agreement succeed; and spoke dismissively and almost contemptuously of the Unionists (with a corresponding gesture of the hand) as people for whom he long since decided he had no time.

It remains that he is evidently concerned about the Unionist reaction and rather worried about it although it is difficult to pin him down on any wish to do anything other than stand fully by the Agreement.

Tom King, Northern Ireland Secretary of State

King too is a bit chastened not to say shaken by the solid Unionist reaction - although he dismissed the physical attack on him at Belfast City Hall airily enough by referring to his training on the rugby field (he did admit that security had been bad).

He referred to his own speech in the debate in the House of Commons yesterday as a very bad speech and he said that this was so because he had been trying so hard to be soft and gentle with the Unionists. What was most needed now was to find some highly visible action preferably in the security field which could attract favourable Unionist attention. He said that someone had said to him in the past day or two that the ideal would be if they offered us six pairs of handcuffs on condition that we were able to fill them. He then referred in a rather airy way to the 50 or so people whom they would like to see picked up "around Letterkenny" and he even speculated on the possibility that, with good intelligence, they could, as it were, put our Government in the way of carrying off some kind of "coup" - by way of a spectacular arrest or otherwise.

To avoid misunderstanding I hasten to say that none of this was said in any kind of polemic way; and I would not think any of it was very well considered. It was rather that King was so to speak wistfully thinking that we should both be looking for something with a high profile in the security field which we could do and which would attract some attention from the Unionists notwithstanding their present very negative mood. When I made the obvious reply about the "wanted" men around Letterkenny (produced a warrant that will stand up and we are ready to act but don't lend credence to vague RUC accusations about large numbers of people walking around unhindered) he fully accepted what I was saying and said spontaneously that they in the North have exactly the same difficulty - there are people of whose involvement in terrorism they have shrewd suspicion but there is still nothing they can do about pinning anything on them. I mentioned lightly that there had been some speculation in

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today's Irish papers about a possible Wren/Hermon meeting in the near future. He did not rise particularly to this - I had the impression he thought it would not really cut much ice with the Unionists at present in the way that something of substance might.

King did ask me to pass on one message - "try if you can to get the Taoiseach to stop calling it 'the Hillsborough Agreement'. That is producing a bad reaction on the Unionist side since it appears to be rubbing their noses in it. Better call it the "Anglo-Irish Agreement".

We had some discussion of the criticism about lack of consultation and I made the same points to King that I had earlier made to Whitelaw. As to Paisley and Molyneaux's meetings with the Prime Minister he said that the British side had conveyed little of real substance on those occasions. I also tried to stress again to King that the game is not over since the Unionists politicians are trying to build up opposition by way of a graduated response. It was important that the two Governments stood firm and tried on their side to win support for the merits of the Agreement.

King is clearly rather worried about how things are beginning to turn out and needs to have his back stiffened a bit. At the same time I had no impression that he was trying to score points or even seeking to back down on any particular aspect of the Agreement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe, Foreign Secretary

I also had a chat with Howe. He commented on the debate on the Agreement in the House of Commons, noting my attendance at it. He acknowledged that he was a bit taken aback at the strength of the Unionist reaction but he did not say a great deal of significance about anything that might now be done and he accepted my point about the need for the two Governments to stand firm.

The Archbishop of Canterbury - Dr Runcie

He did not volunteer anything of great substance about the Agreement but I would guess he is not opposed though in a rather reserved way. He is due to Cork in the relatively near future for a meeting of the British Council of Churches; and his wife is to give a concert in Dublin next June. He also told me that he had been giving some consideration to a suggestion that he and Cardinal Hume should go together to Armagh to meet Cardinal O Fiaich and Archbishop Armstrong before the latter retires next year. He felt however, because of present reactions to the Agreement that this might not be the best time for this.

Charles Powell, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

I had a brief word with Powell who, like others, acknowledged that the Prime Minister had been surprised at the strength of the Unionists reaction.

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Sir Robert Armstrong and David Goodall

I had some discussion with each but nothing of great importance emerged. (As you may know Armstrong and I are to give a joint briefing on Monday, 2 December, to the Bishops Liaison Committee at Archbishop's House, Westminster).

Yours sincerely

end

HP

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