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IMMEDIATE

FOR ALL O'NEATHALL
From TED SMITH

Mr B. L. Campbell
25/2/86
2572

STATEMENT ISSUED FOLLOWING THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH
UNIONIST LEADERS ON 25 FEBRUARY 1986

1. The Prime Minister had a meeting today lasting just over one and a half hours with Mr. Molyneux of the Ulster Unionist Party and Dr. Paisley of the Democratic Unionist Party.
2. The Prime Minister, while reaffirming the Government's commitment to the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, made it clear that the Government would like to establish new arrangements for enabling unionists to make their views known to the Government on affairs in Northern Ireland. She said that she would welcome discussion with the unionist leaders of the form that such arrangements might take. The Prime Minister also offered consultations with the unionist leaders about the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly and about the arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business in Parliament at Westminster.
3. The Prime Minister agreed to consider positively a suggestion by Mr. Molyneux and Dr. Paisley that the Government should call a Round Table conference to discuss devolution in Northern Ireland. She said that the Government would be willing to consider any system of devolution that would command widespread acceptance in Northern Ireland.
- * 4. It was agreed that the Prime Minister and the unionist leaders would reflect on the various suggestions that had been made and would meet again shortly. It was understood that, if after discussion with all concerned the ideas raised in our talk today bore fruit, we should need to ^{consider} ~~to~~ ^{what} ~~consider~~ what that meant for the work of the Intergovernmental Conference.
5. The Prime Minister will be discussing the various ideas in forthcoming meetings with Mr. Hume of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Mr. Kilfedder of the Ulster Popular Unionist Party and Mr. Cushnahan of the Alliance Party.

Statement issued 25/2/86
Meeting between British PM
+ Unionists

The Secretariat in Belfast has been given a preliminary indication of how the Unionist/Thatcher meeting went this morning. The main points are:

- there was not too much aggression;
- there will be a further meeting;
- the Unionists will go away to think;
- it was not clear what they would do;
- they were not involved in any strike plans.

Robert Stimpson, British Embassy has also received a message which largely confirms the above. The talks went on for about two hours. They went as well as could be expected in the circumstances. The Prime Minister indicated that she would discuss the ideas raised with the other Northern Ireland political parties. She used for form of words we had been given last night (i.e. "What I can say is that after discussions with all concerned we would need to consider what that meant for the work of the Conference").

Ted Smyth, London Embassy has heard that Paislye insisted that the all party conference could not be held except if the Agreement went and he had remarked that Hume would not accept this. Apparently the British side pointed out that there was no need to define what context (i.e. Agreement or not) the Conference would be held in. The Unionist side had emphasised Mrs. Thatcher's Belfast Telegraph interview where the implication had been that acceptance of devolution would mean the end of the Agreement. On the idea of parallel consultation Paisley had insisted that this would have to be outside the Agreement.

Mr. King, coming out of the meeting, said to the press that they had talked about a proposal for a round table conference and had looked at issues such as devolution, the future of the Assembly and the question of Parliamentary business and the handling of Northern Ireland business in Westminster. They had discussed the need to consider all these matters and the need for machinery for proper consultation including security policy.

EO Tushard

DFA 25.2.86