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Meeting with Paul Arthur on 27 February, 1986

Paul Arthur is a senior lecturer in Political Science at the new University of Ulster in Whiteabbey. When I met him in Belfast on 27 February he made the following comments on the current situation in Northern Ireland:

He said he was not surprised at the Unionist decision to reject the Prime Minister's offer on Tuesday last of further talks. They are going through a catharsis which must be exorcised before they will consider negotiating. He said that in past crises there was always a willingness among some elements within the Unionist hierarchy to talk to him about possible solutions. That this has not yet happened is an indication he felt of how united the Unionist politicians are in their determination to go down the confrontitorial road to get rid of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. However, he expressed a willingness to act as a conduit to set up a meeting between us and the Unionist parties if we so wished. (I made no comment)

Most Unionists will not allow themselves to be led into a situation of certain confrontation with the British. He believes they will eventually expect that negotiations must take place. This will come about when they believe that the British Government will not back down on the Agreement and its implementation. There is nothing the Irish Government can do to convince the Unionists that they should negotiate under the Agreement. He said that at present everything being said by Dublin is resented and disbelieved.

Ian Paisley is now seen to have lost control of the DUP and this would seem to indicate that a change of leadership might occur there too. While Peter Robnson might first appear to be

the obvious successor, the Party is closely bound up with the Free Presbyterian Church and he is not even a member, a fact which does not endear him to Paisley. He secured his place within the party by having a surplus vote of $2\frac{1}{2}$ times quota at the Assembly elections for the DUP. It is more likely that either Rev. McCrea or Rev. McI would get the job. However, as none of them are strong or bright enough to challenge Paisley he most likely will lead on. He said it would be very difficult to talk to Peter Robinson whom he described as a demagogue. However, he said that Sammy Wilson was very pragmatic and could be reasonable if he felt there was no other plausible alternative.

The view now is that not only the DUP but most politicians in the OUP wanted to have some kind of confrontation with the British Government and so they rejected the offer brought back by Molyneaux and Paisley. The UDA which is still regarded as the most formidable loyalist paramilitary force was represented at the meeting. However, Robinson and McCusker are also seen to represent the paramilitaries and have a great deal of control over them.

He said that if the Agreement failed the only ones to profit would be the IRA. The SDLP would lose credibility and a great deal of votes to Sinn Fein. The Unionists will probably have handed over power to loyalist paramilitaries and will have lost all credibility in Britain. The Irish Government will have given a written guarantee on the Union, signed and perhaps ratified the Convention on Terrorism, co-operated on security and told the International community that the Agreement would work. However, the British Government will have gained the above and be able to say to the world that we tried to keep "the Paddies from destroying each other but it was an impossible task and we can do no more".

He had been told by the Trade Unions that about 200 workers in Harland and Wolff were trying to oppose the strike but the intimidation there was so great that very few floor workers

would turn in. Similar problems were being experienced in most employments with large loyalist working populations.

Liam Canniffe

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5 March 1986

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