



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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BRITISH EMBASSY,  
DUBLIN.

14 March 1986

Mr George Shaw  
Dept of the Taoiseach  
Government Buildings  
Upper Merrion Street  
DUBLIN 2

*Dear George*

/ I am enclosing a signed copy of the letter of 7 March from the Prime Minister to the Taoiseach, the text of which the Ambassador passed to Dr FitzGerald on 8 March.

*Yours sincerely*  
*P M Innes.*

P M Innes



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

7 March 1986

*Dear Garet,*

Thank you for your letter of 24 February following our earlier meeting. Events have moved on since then, and it may help to give you my personal impressions of how matters stand following the talks I have had with the Unionist leaders, with John Hume and with John Cushnahan, and most recently the Unionist "day of action" on 3 March.

When I met the Unionists there was a good deal of plain talking: I refused to countenance any suggestion that the Agreement could be abandoned or suspended. The furthest that I was prepared to go on this central issue was to undertake to operate the Agreement sensitively - and I shall return to that point below. I did, however, take full account of the strength of Unionist feeling against aspects of the Agreement. I laid stress on the fact that, as you yourself have suggested, the Agreement provides that any matters devolved to a Northern Ireland administration would no longer fall for discussion in the Conference - a point which we shall be working hard to get across in Northern Ireland where it seems as yet to be imperfectly understood. I readily agreed, therefore, to consider Mr. Molyneaux's and Dr. Paisley's suggestion of a round table Conference (which Mr. Hume and Mr. Cushnahan were also willing to endorse) at which devolution might be discussed. I remain convinced that sensible arrangements for devolution which command widespread acceptance throughout the community offer the best long term

hope for peace and stability in the Province.

I also, as you will know, made other suggestions which were designed to take account of legitimate Unionist concerns and to counter their feeling that they are excluded from influence on decision making in Northern Ireland. I accordingly offered them new arrangements for consultation with the Government about affairs in Northern Ireland including security. I also offered them consultations about the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly and about the way in which Northern Ireland matters are handled at Westminster.

At the end of our meeting the Unionist leaders appeared to be willing to talk constructively about the future without pressing their demand that the Agreement be suspended. But as we saw, on their return to Belfast, they were unable to carry their supporters with them. In the light both of that turnaround and still more of what happened on 3 March, no one can be in any doubt either about the strength of Unionist feelings nor of the formidable difficulties with which we are faced in the Province. As for the events of 3 March themselves, I do not think that I can do better than send you a copy of what Tom King said in the House on Tuesday. I scarcely need to say how much I deplore the disgraceful tactics adopted by opponents of our Agreement. You will also see from that statement just how great were the additional pressures imposed on the RUC by the strikers, and what they nevertheless managed to achieve. I should also tell you, in confidence, that Tom King has asked the Chief Constable for an urgent report on the policing aspects of the "day of action". In addition to providing facts and figures, etc., the Chief Constable has also been asked to deal with the allegations which have been made that the police did not do enough to prevent the intimidation of those who were seeking to get to work.

However, as a result of my meeting with Mr. Molyneux and Dr. Paisley, the Unionists can be in no doubt that the British Government will not be deflected from its

determination to implement the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and that there can be no question of asking Parliament to repudiate a measure to which barely three months ago it gave massive endorsement. The events of last Monday have in no way weakened that determination, nor will recourse to similar action in future.

At the same time, we have to recognise that more than determination on our part will be necessary if we are to get through what will undoubtedly be some very difficult months ahead. I know that you share my view that it is important at the present time to avoid exacerbating Unionists sensitivities, and the events of the "day of action" underline just how essential this continues to be. We also need to find all possible ways of commending the Agreement to moderate and reasonable Unionists who must, I am sure, be dismayed by the recent turn of events. I regard it, therefore, as vital that the SDLP adopts a generous and statesmanlike approach during this critical period. I left Mr. Hume in no doubt that it is not enough now to sit back and leave it to us to deal with Unionist opposition. None of us will benefit if we simply exchange an estranged minority for a non-cooperative majority. The Unionists cannot make me abandon the Agreement. But their prolonged hostility can prevent it from achieving the reconciliation and stability that we both seek. I welcome what the SDLP have already done by way, for example, of avoiding triumphalism; and Mr. Hume's recent declaration of readiness to talk about devolution without preconditions was also helpful. He told me that I would find the SDLP "constructive". I hope that, with your help, this will indeed prove so, and that they will also show discretion. (Mr. Mallon's widely reported remarks on RUC conduct on Monday were, as so often, the reverse of helpful, and I appreciated the way you took the sting out of what he said). In the coming weeks, the Unionist leaders will be looking for any action or statements from the SDLP - or indeed from the Republic - that they can use to confirm their supporters' fears of the agreement. It remains vital to deprive them of such ammunition, and that is another

reason why I so much welcomed your signature, without reservation, of the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism.

It is no less imperative that we can demonstrate the benefits for all the people of Northern Ireland that the Agreement is capable of bringing. It is essential that we should be seen to be making progress in the Intergovernmental Conference in those areas which, while serving our common interest, will be welcome to Unionists. I have in mind, in particular, the need for visible and substantial progress in enhancing security cooperation at all levels and in all the areas covered in Article 9(a) of the Agreement. It was the pursuit of such objectives, combined with restraint in making claims for the Conference and care in avoiding precipitate action which would offend Unionists' sensitivities that I had in mind when I referred to operating the Agreement "sensitively". I have not given up hope of bringing the Unionists back to the path of constructive dialogue that, for a moment, they seemed ready to follow last week. The offers I then made to them remain on the table. To that end I know I can count on your support and understanding. I hope that the SDLP will play their part.

You raised a number of more detailed matters in your letter. You asked, for instance, about actual statements that we had found unhelpful: I am arranging for these to be followed up by officials, though I enclose three examples of statements which inevitably raise hackles in the North. You also provided information about your Government's commitment to security on the border: I note that the comparisons are generally with 1969 rather than the period immediately before the Agreement. For the present at least, this subject might be pursued by the new quadripartite group of policemen and officials from both sides which held its first meeting in Belfast last week. But I think that we both agree that our first priority now must be to be seen to make progress as rapidly as possible in a way that will help the majority in

the North, however reluctantly in many cases, to accept that the Agreement is not only here to stay, but can further, rather than damage, their own interests.

Yours sincerely

Rargant

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Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D.