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From the Private Secretary

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RUCS & 1014
STORMONT HOUSE ANNEX

cc PS/545 B-1149
PS/M S.H. L
PS/PCS L
PS/PCS B-1149
Mr Bloomfield MS89
Mr Brennan
Mr Stephens - M789
Mr Cheston
Mr Bell

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONGANGLO-IRISH TALKS: NORTHERN IRELAND

The Taoiseach telephoned the Prime Minister this afternoon about the dates for the proposed Anglo-Irish Summit.

The Taoiseach said that good progress had been made in the negotiations and only a couple of points were still outstanding. They were basically presentational and he felt they could be resolved. His concern was that unless the Agreement was completed soon, there would be leaks which would make it progressively more difficult for both Governments to finalise the negotiations. He was particularly concerned that the Agreement should be signed before the forthcoming SDLP Conference on 8-10 November. He feared that otherwise resolutions might be passed at the Conference which would make it more difficult for the SDLP to support the Agreement.

The Prime Minister explained the difficulties for her in finding a date before 15 November, although she was prepared to consider the possibility of the late afternoon or evening of Wednesday 13 November if this would help. The Taoiseach said that this would not meet the problem over the SDLP Conference. He pressed the Prime Minister strongly to agree to Friday 8 November. The Prime Minister said that the problem with this was that it would mean signing the Agreement only 48 hours after she had delivered her speech for the Debate on the Address, in which she would not be able

to mention the forthcoming Agreement. It might expose her to charges of bad faith. There was also the consideration that Friday was not an ideal day since there could be no Statement in the House until the following Monday, with the danger that the Unionists' dissatisfaction would break out on to the streets rather than be channelled through Parliament. However, she would talk to her colleagues before departing for CHOGM and let the Taoiseach know her conclusion.

After talking to the Northern Ireland Secretary and Chief Whip (the Lord President was not available), the Prime Minister telephoned the Taoiseach to say that she and her colleagues now saw a fresh difficulty with 8 November, and that was its proximity to Remembrance Sunday. The Government would be accused of insensitivity if it signed an agreement immediately beforehand; and the unionists would find it easier to stir up emotions against the agreement in the context of Remembrance Day. She really saw no option, therefore, but to revert to 15 November. She wondered whether the SDLP could not postpone its conference.

The point about Remembrance Day evidently carried weight with the Taoiseach. He doubted whether it would be possible for the SDLP to change its conference dates. But he agreed that there seemed to be no other option than 15 November.

I am copying this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

C.D. POWELL

15 October 1985