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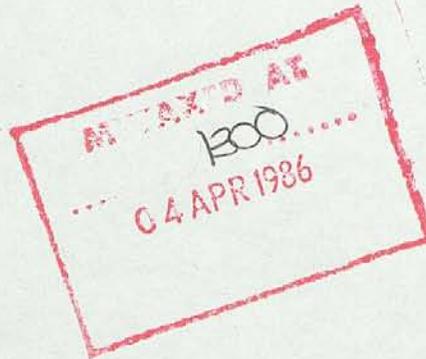
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Mr Brennan -M
Mr Chesterton -M
Mr M Elliott
Mr Spence
Miss Elliott -M
Mr McConnell
Mr Bell -M
Mr Ehrman -M

PS/Secretary of State B&L -M

RE-OPENING POLITICAL DIALOGUE

1. I remain extremely concerned about the consequences for Northern Ireland if we do not find in the near future some means to get political dialogue re-opened. The polarisation in the community, the problems for the police and the growing influence of paramilitary and other malign forces are only too obvious.
2. It is now clear that the terms of the Prime Minister's letter have not been sufficient at this stage to bring the Unionist Parties into dialogue. As the Secretary of State knows, I believe it might have been possible to secure the agreement of the Irish to a pause in the working of the Intergovernmental Conference which would not have been inconsistent with the provision for "regular and frequent Ministerial meetings". We were receiving clear signals from them that they were willing to consider this if we asked for it.
3. One could conclude from these exchanges that it is hopeless to try to talk to the Unionists, either because any "concession" will simply make them ask for more, or because the Party leaders are no longer in command of events. I would think it quite premature to reach such a conclusion. Moreover the responsible elements of the majority community, including those prominent in commerce and industry, will be progressively demoralised if we seem to be immovably stuck in an impasse.

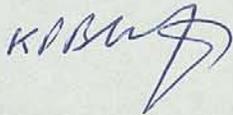
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POLITICAL DIALOGUE
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4. I reported on 27 March my exchanges with Mr West and others. Mr West has since been back in touch with me by telephone to argue the importance of Government providing answers to some at least of the questions tabled on that occasion by Mr McNarry (and circulated with Miss Doake's note of the same date). In addition, the Secretary of State will wish to know that Lord Moyola called to see me on 3 April. It was clear from our discussion that when he meets the Prime Minister with Lord Brookeborough they will be pressing strongly upon her the view that some means must be found to get Mr Molyneaux in particular off the hook and allow him to go forward into constructive discussion.

5. In an attempt to clear my own thinking, I have attempted to draft (and I / attach) the sort of statement by the Secretary of State which might serve to remove the impasse at some stage. I realise that a number of the statements in it (and in particular those which are square-bracketed) are not covered by current policy and would need very careful consideration. But I believe it would be useful firmly to rule out integration or independence, to concentrate minds on the options of devolution or continuing direct rule, and to spell out more specifically what "sensitivity" in operating the Agreement and the Conference arrangements really means. I remain, as I stated in my minute of 2 April, extremely pessimistic about the prospects for devolution, but that is a matter which can only be fully tested if and when we get into discussion.



K P BLOOMFIELD

4 April 1986

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It is, I think, important that I should spell out very clearly the implications of the Anglo-Irish Agreement for the future government and administration of Northern Ireland.

First of all, it is necessary to emphasize that the Agreement is not a system for the government of the Province. It provides for the Irish Government, on behalf of that very substantial minority of the people of Northern Ireland who think of themselves as Irish, to have a voice and an influence upon the British Government as it continues to exercise its sovereign authority. The Intergovernmental Conference established by the Agreement is not a supra-national body, like the organs of the European Community, which hand down decisions which bind the British Government. Its Secretariat has no authority whatsoever over any government department or other public body or service in Northern Ireland. In the vital field of law and order the Chief Constable will not be given, nor would he be willing to accept, any operational directions from Conference or Secretariat. Nor, for that matter, will he be receiving any such directions from me.

The Agreement does not provide, and cannot provide, the opportunity for either community in Northern Ireland to participate directly in the government and administration of the Province. That is an obvious and continuing vacuum. While it lasts, all we can have is the second best of seeking the views of the communities and their elected representatives. The Government established the Northern

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Ireland Assembly, both for that purpose and in the hope that it could be used to produce widely acceptable proposals for devolution. If the Assembly is now having no influence on government policy or legislation, this is solely because the parties in control of it have decided for the time being to abdicate that influence. I know they do so as a form of political protest. But it is surely a perverse and peculiarly negative form of protest. It is not as if the views of the Assembly have, since it was set up, been ignored. Far from it. Not so long ago the Assembly itself was apt to refer with some legitimate pride to the visible influence its various recommendations had had on government policy and legislation.

Of course I continue to regret very much that the SDLP has not felt able to take up its seats in the Assembly. But I believe it would be quite wrong to conclude from this that the SDLP have no interest in participating in the government and administration of Northern Ireland. There is, I know, a current view which might be crudely expressed as "they are quite happy to let Mr Barry speak for them". If that were so, the SDLP would indeed be a unique political party in my experience. All that Mr Barry has under the Agreement is, I repeat, a voice and an influence; and to the extent that Mr Barry in turn listens to the views of the SDLP as spokesmen for constitutional nationalism in Northern Ireland, that party may be said to have a voice and an influence at second hand or indirectly. That is certainly not a privileged position compared with that of Unionist and other members of the Assembly, before whom Ministers and officials had very willingly been appearing to explain and be questioned about policy and administration in great detail. Nor is it the same as access to power; the ultimate power to get things done which is the goal of political parties all over the world.

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I believe we now need inter-party talks in Northern Ireland, and we need them urgently. The Government stands ready to facilitate such talks in any way it can. We would, of course, as the Prime Minister has already made very clear in her correspondence with Dr Paisley and Mr Molyneaux, wish to operate the Intergovernment Conference arrangements sensitively. [Let us be sensible about this. If I were presiding over an inter-party conference in Northern Ireland, and giving to that task the highest priority and the most complete attention, I could not at the same time be sitting as co-chairman of the Intergovernmental Conference with Mr Barry. This certainly does not mean that I would be prepared to see some unreasonable or indefinite hiatus in the business of the Intergovernmental Conference. We have committed ourselves under the Agreement to regular and frequent meetings, and we shall continue to honour that obligation. But the Agreement also recognises that devolution can be achieved only with the co-operation of constitutional representatives within Northern Ireland of both traditions there; and there is complete agreement as between the Irish and ourselves that the pattern of regular and frequent meetings should, in the immediate future, be such as to allow the prospects for devolution, and other matters relevant to the government and administration of Northern Ireland, to be adequately explored through inter-party talks.]

I appreciate that, if and when the Northern Ireland parties come to the conference table, they will do so with their fundamental political views intact. The Unionist parties would clearly be coming to that table with their known and declared antipathy to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The SDLP would no doubt be coming to

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that table with their existing full commitment to the Agreement, and with their well-known views about the need for direct participation in Executive power. We ourselves would be coming to that table with the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a reality, in terms of a commitment to which we as a country have bound ourselves in the eyes of the international community. All of these positions - distinctive, firmly-held, and at present seemingly incompatible - would no doubt have to be laid on the table at some stage.

But could we not begin by examining together, in a serious and conscientious way, the options for the government of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom? I choose those words carefully and deliberately. Such options could not, by definition, include any form of independence for Northern Ireland. The British Government is not prepared to entertain a concept which could only lead to disastrous consequences and is not, in our view, desired by any substantial or responsible section of Northern Ireland opinion.

This leaves, then, the options of devolution, intergration or direct rule (whether in its existing or in a modified form). Of course it would be possible to continue with direct rule, and it would also be possible to consider modifying it in a number of ways, for example by seeking to improve the processes of Parliamentary scrutiny, debate and consideration of Northern Ireland business. But I fear that no such improvements could get to the root of the problem, which is that Ministers under direct rule do not have a political base in the Province. The Secretary of State for Scotland is not merely "Scotland's Minister" but also a Scottish Minister. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland may be "Northern Ireland's Minister", but

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he is not an Ulster Minister. That fundamental defect of direct rule is widely perceived, not least by those of us who hold or have held Ministerial office under it.

So where do we turn for a better and more acceptable system? I realise the deep appeal which the idea of integration makes to some unionists. I have read my history, and I appreciate that the Stormont Parliament was not sought at the time by those who wished to preserve the Union. By those who favour integration the emphasis on devolution is argued to be simply a means of fostering and encouraging a "separateness" which could one day make it easier for the British State to disengage and for a United Ireland to come about. So why, if I say I am myself a convinced unionist (and I do), do I not encourage this option? Would it not remove all reason for claims by the nationalist minority, that they are likely to be oppressed by the unionist majority, if both minority and majority alike were to be assured of precisely the same rights, privileges and protections as all other citizens of the United Kingdom? Of course one consequence of running Northern Ireland as if it were simply an area of 1½m people in England would be the exercise of extensive powers within Northern Ireland by democratically elected local government. I ask the question frankly: has the conduct of local authorities here in all cases been such as to reassure minorities that they could safely look to those authorities for fair and sensitive treatment? Of course one would expect the integration option to be openly discussed if we were able to get the parties around a table. But I would be bound to say that I do not believe proposals for integration would ever carry a majority in Parliament. This is not because we wish to foster or encourage "separateness". How easy it would be if only 100% of the population of Northern Ireland did indeed feel themselves in every way to be completely British.

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It is not creating the problem but recognising the problem to acknowledge that a very, very substantial minority of the people who live in Northern Ireland do not feel this. Those who write slogans on walls to proclaim that Ulster is this or that or the other should on occasions show more sensitivity to the existence of another Ulster which has its own traditions, values and sense of identity. It is simply flying in the face of reality to imagine that by waving a magic wand called "integration" Northern Ireland could be turned into a homogeneous, undifferentiated part of the United Kingdom.

And so inevitably one comes back to devolution, with all its known difficulties and pitfalls. After all the efforts and attempts made since 1972 no one could underestimate the difficulty of meeting the test of widespread acceptance. Yet progress has, I believe, been made in a number of directions. I am well aware that the Assembly has formally removed the so-called "Catherwood proposals" from the table; nevertheless ideas about - for example - the use of weighted majorities remain a real contribution to the political debate. The so-called "Northern Ireland Charter" suggested by some members of the UUP after dialogue with some members of the SDLP embodies interesting ideas about participation and the means to foster a basic loyalty to Northern Ireland within both communities.

There is plenty to talk about. And of course a productive outcome from talks about devolution would have a major bearing upon the future working of the Intergovernmental Conference established under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. For all those matters devolved into the care of local political leadership in Northern Ireland would no longer be a concern of the Conference, and any discussion with

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the Irish about those matters would be the sole responsibility of the devolved executive government of Northern Ireland. The Government of the United Kingdom would, of course, continue to discuss within the ambit of the Conference matters reserved to them; but it would be necessary to recognise in some appropriate way the legitimate interest of a local administration in such areas as security, even in the absence of any direct responsibility for it. [If the outcome of devolution discussions made this desirable, the government would be prepared to consider requesting a review of the working of the Conference under Article 11 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.]

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