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cc. PS/Mr Scott B&L-M
PS/PUS B&L-M
Mr Brennan -M
Mr Stephens
Mr Chesterton-M
Mr M Elliott

PS/Secretary of State B&L-M

ENCOURAGING POLITICAL DIALOGUE

1. I spoke to the Secretary of State yesterday about the possibility of fostering and encouraging some movement towards political dialogue within the Province. The purpose of this submission is to suggest some objectives and how they might be pursued.

Devolution as a Final Objective

2. Our existing policy and Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement commit us to the pursuit of devolution. While the political campaign currently being pursued by Bob McCartney is, I think, profoundly unrealistic in terms of wider British political and parliamentary opinion, it identifies a fundamental flaw in Direct Rule - that the governors, United Kingdom Ministers, have no political roots in the community they are required to govern. But devolution is desirable not only because direct rule is flawed in this way, but because the real breach which good government seeks to heal is essentially the breach which exists between the two communities in the North. It is this breach which creates the strain in the wider relationships between Britain and Ireland which would otherwise reflect the reality of two sister communities, with a shared language of common parlance and many shared traditions and interests. An Anglo-Irish Agreement which does not begin to heal the breach within Northern Ireland itself would, in the long run, prove to have been little more than a poultice applied to a deep injury. Moreover for the unionist community movement towards devolution represents the only way forward for them in terms of hoping to circumscribe the influence of the Irish Government

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as, in their view, an "external" power. Devolution removes from the ambit of the Conference matters which would otherwise be within it, and perhaps creates a basis on which further review of the Conference under Article 11 of the Agreement could take place.

Elections as an Interim Objective

3. However, I believe the achievement of devolution is, in the present and foreseeable political conditions, "a bridge too far". It was difficult enough to create, and ultimately impossible to sustain, a power-sharing Executive even in the more favourable circumstances of 1973-74. It would be a profound optimist who would believe that the current pieces on the Northern Ireland political board can at any early stage be brought together into a harmonious picture of inter-party co-operation.

4. For this reason there now seems to be widespread support in the Office for the idea that a realistic interim objective would be to persuade all the constitutional parties to take part at some time in elections to a new Assembly, initially (once again) with advisory and consultative powers only. At the very worst such an Assembly would be a measure to temper the effects of continuing direct rule by a means to express local political views. I have never believed that in expressing such views there can be any credible substitute for the politicians, however obdurate, elected by the population. At best, a new Assembly might be a forum in which once again the now very polarised parties would get to know each other as individuals, developing in time enough confidence to be able to talk about the possibility of moving on to a further stage.

The Immediate Need

5. The immediate need is to get the Northern Ireland Constitutional Parties at least talking to each other again. At a secondary stage, if real political progress has been made, Government will have to be drawn directly into

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the process. But its involvement now is not likely to assist such progress, because unionists would certainly insist, as a quid pro quo for talking to Government, upon at least a suspension of the Agreement. The implications of any emerging devolution agreement, or agreement to participate in elections to a new Assembly, for the future operation of the Conference would have to be considered at some stage. It is not, however, in our interests to ask the runners to jump the highest hurdle so close to the starting point.

6. Here we come to the possible role of that substantial body of non-political interests now known to be worried about the deteriorating situation, already meeting in a number of separate but sometimes overlapping groups, and anxious to promote some political movement without being quite sure how to go about it. I have already mentioned the efforts of Harry West and his associates, of a group which includes Jim McCusker, of NIPSA and of the Consensus Group with Professor Rea and the Reverend John Dunlop; also of the willingness of Sir Desmond Lorimer to be of help if he can. Last night at a Hillsborough Dinner I spoke to Alastair McLoughlin of the CBI about Tom Rainey's strong speech at yesterday's CBI Lunch, and he told me that behind this speech lies a strong and growing feeling by the industrial interests (CBI, NICCI, IOD, BIM) that they must be looking for some means to influence events which seem to be moving in so malign a direction. Sir John Swinson, who was also there, spoke to me of the meeting of yet another ad hoc group which includes Eric McDowall Chairman of the IDB.
7. I believe that much better shape and hope for success could be given to these efforts ^{if} they had clear tactical aims. It is evident to me that many of them would welcome informal guidance as to how they might best direct their efforts. My view is that they could perhaps be persuaded to do three very useful things:-

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is always the risk that if we release a senior civil servant the hand of Government will be too clearly seen. On the other hand, the sponsors of an effort could perhaps be moved to ask for him to be released as a former member of the Convention team.

Making a Start

8. If we now take some steps to suggest a particular way forward to these groups, there must of course be a danger, (not, I think, a very serious one if discreet people are selected) of the hand of Government being detected, leading almost certainly to the unionists regarding any such approaches as a Trojan Horse. However I believe it would be better to accept that risk than to accept the much greater risk, indeed the virtual certainty, that the Northern Ireland parties will simply remain in the trenches with all political dialogue "frozen" until, at the earliest, a United Kingdom general election which could still be well ahead of us. In such circumstances I fear that the current wish of moderate interests to play a positive role will fade away into demoralisation and apathy, and not be easy to revive.

9. I hope, therefore, the Secretary of State will feel able to agree that I may talk further to a limited number of trusted people (Sir Desmond Lorimer, Sir Jack Swinson, Mr Eric McDowall, Professor Desmond Rea, Mr Jim McCusker) to see if it would be possible to find a catalyst for the sort of action envisaged in paragraph 7 above. Some individual would have to be willing to take the initial step of drawing an extensive group together and putting proposals to them. I would be hopeful that we could achieve this. From that point on, the outcome is most uncertain. At best, I regard the prospect of restarting political dialogue here as an outside chance. If talks do get under way they are bound to be difficult. Even if provisional progress is made on hypothetical arrangements for internal government, the process may still break itself to pieces in due course against the reality of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But we have, I would suggest, little to lose in encouraging an attempt which would at least put some

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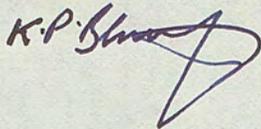
- (i) They could seek to bring together so strong a coalition of non-political interests, drawn from right across the community, that no political party will be able lightly to laugh it to scorn. Ideally such a coalition would embrace both sides of industry (the management organisation and NIC/ICTU), the UFU and the leaders of all the main churches, Protestant and Roman Catholic.
- (ii) They should seek to encapsulate the aim of the coalition - ie to start a process of political dialogue - in an agreed declaration designed to put powerful moral pressure upon the parties. They should look for the support of responsible and sympathetic media in publicising such a declaration and helping to build up pressure based upon it. I attach to this submission a draft of the sort of declaration I would envisage.
- (iii) As the draft declaration shows, I believe they should not merely seek to put pressure upon the parties to move into dialogue, but should be prepared to offer them a mechanism for doing so. This might be a form of informal commission, independent of Government, capable of acting somewhat as the team of the Convention Chairman did during the life of the Northern Ireland Convention. I think such work would best be done by a three-man team of "eminent persons". In view of his continuing links with Northern Ireland and his reputation for good and cool judgement one of these might be Lord Grey. For the other two places, it might be possible to "borrow" the services of Robert Ramsay, Secretary General of the European Democratic Group in the European Parliament, a former private secretary both to the late Brian Faulkner and to Roy Mason as Secretary of State, and a person of very considerable political and bureaucratic ability. To succeed, such a group would also need someone with excellent connections in the Roman Catholic Community. When I think about this I feel that no one could play such a role better than Maurice Hayes. I have no idea whether he would be willing to be used in such a way, and there

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stiffening and some shape and sense of purpose into the growing but disorganised elements who are frustrated and dismayed by what they see as a descent into further communal disharmony.



K P BLOOMFIELD

4 September 1986

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A DECLARATION

As responsible leaders in the community, not involved in politics, we have watched with mounting concern the growth of tensions which are a threat to good relations in the community and which can only further undermine the fragile economy of Northern Ireland. We are dismayed by the evident political and sectarian polarisation and by the opportunities for exploitation this affords to violent men and organisations. We note that many of the forums within which dialogue, even as between political opponents, would normally take place are largely or even completely inoperative.

We believe the re-opening of dialogue is now imperative. In so declaring, we express no view about the likely or preferred outcome of such dialogue. It is for the elected politicians, not for us, to chart the political future of Northern Ireland.

The British Government must, of course, ultimately have a crucial role in any attempt to move forward from this dangerous place. But we believe it would be best, in the present atmosphere, to promote dialogue in the first instance as between the political leaders elected by the people of Northern Ireland themselves.

We have considered the implications and the merits of the various methods used in recent years to facilitate discussions between parties. We believe that, in the light of this experience, there is merit in the idea of an independent individual or group being available to promote communication and contact, somewhat on the lines of the arrangements made for the Northern Ireland Convention. If political leaders are prepared to respond positively to the present call for dialogue we are ready to

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put into place such a group, chosen solely on the basis that they are persons commanding our general confidence and respect, and we believe also deserving such confidence and respect from political leadership.