

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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FROM: I M BURNS, DUS(L)
23 October 1989

OF THE N.I.
23 OCT 1989

cc: PS/Minister of State(L&B)
PS/Dr Mawhinney(L) o.r.
PS/PUS(L&B)
PS/Sir K Bloomfield ^{24/x} 2 per 2
Mr Miles
Mr Thomas
Mr Kirk
Mr J McConnell o.r.

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE(L&B)

DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY

Mr McConnell, Mr Marsh and I duly met Mr Robinson and Mr Wilson of the DUP on Monday afternoon, 16 October. I enclose a copy of the record made by Mr Marsh.

2. The meeting was very much an introductory one. After re-confirming that we were still genuinely interested in devolution (I said we were) the DUP pair began to explore gently the mechanics of the way we might make progress. By common consent we did not attempt to go as far as discussion of the actual issues that might arise in talks. The meeting seemed to me and Mr McConnell to be a successful one, in that it re-established communication with the DUP at that level (both Mr McConnell and I know both Robinson and Wilson well) and gave both sides a guarded sense of confidence that it was worthwhile putting some effort into trying to make progress on talks.

3. The next step, helpfully, will be for the DUP to bring a larger team of people to see us. Robinson and Wilson want to make sure that they are bringing their full team along with their thinking (this is also in our interest - if there is any progress it needs to involve the party as a whole). I have therefore agreed with Robinson that at the next meeting (probably on 25 October) we will go through exactly the same

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agenda again. I have cautioned him against raising new questions in such an environment, since it would be easy for an unprepared reply to be misunderstood by those members of the wider team who do not normally come into contact with the NIO. Any new ground, and any reasonably frank talk is better conducted in a smaller group. I expect therefore that after the second meeting the third meeting will turn out to be another meeting of the smaller group, in which we may again hope that some progress will be made.

4. So far so good.

SIGNED

I M BURNS

23 October 1989

OAB 6447

DUSL/MR/12337

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PAB/5587/RN

TALKS WITH THE DUP: 16 OCTOBER 1989

1. The first meeting with the DUP took place at 5.15 pm on Monday 16 October. The DUP were represented by Peter Robinson and Sammy Wilson; Mr Burns was accompanied by Mr J McConnell and Mr Marsh.
2. Mr Robinson opened by stating his reasons for coming. There had been a political stalemate for some time. He had hoped that there would have been movement after Duisberg, when the two unionist leaders had agreed a formula to allow negotiations to take place. John Hume had claimed that he had no difficulties with this formula, but on presenting it to his SDLP colleagues had come back with a "further proposal" which the unionist leaders at first thought amounted to a rejection. (One of the difficulties with the SDLP, Mr Robinson said, was their tendency to distance themselves from any such agreed document by characterising it as a unionist proposal.) Following a further approach from Mr Hume, however, the process was about to re-start when the Alliance Party for their own reasons leaked it to the BBC. A meeting was then held between Mr Robinson, Mr Hume and Mr Currie at which it was agreed to suspend progress during the spring and summer of 1989 but to start up again in the autumn. That period was now upon us; and Mr Robinson claimed that he and others had been trying to create the necessary helpful atmosphere.
3. What Mr Robinson envisaged was a "conference table situation". The obstacle to this, through which a path had to be found, was the unionist belief in the necessity for a period of non-implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The DUP were now suggesting that the unionist rule that MPs should have no contact with the Government (which, he said, had held firm save in "special circumstances") should be relaxed to allow DUP and NIO officials to do some preliminary spadework. This, which had been cleared at a DUP

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officers' conference, would stop short of committing either the unionist leaders or Ministers. It was now time to establish whether the Government were still committed to devolution, and if so whether such a course would be useful.

4. Mr Burns stated the Government position. The Secretary of State wished responsibility and powers to be returned to locally elected representatives. These were no preconceptions, and Mr Brooke was willing to listen to any proposals from Northern Ireland parties which had been agreed and appeared workable. The Secretary of State had specifically authorised the present meeting, in order to explore the mechanics of a possible way forward. Sooner or later other people would have to be brought in but for the time being he was prepared to explore whether matters could be taken forward bilaterally with the DUP. In answer to a question Mr Robinson confirmed that he and Mr Wilson were speaking simply for the DUP at this stage, and that the first priority must be to remove the obstacle to talks he had already mentioned. Mr Robinson felt that a large DUP team would be useful; he would find it helpful to tie more of his party colleagues into the process, and this in turn might give the NIO more confidence in what he would be saying. Nonetheless, he did not wish the group to become too unwieldy; and he felt that he could speak with confidence for the party of which he was deputy leader. Mr Burns confirmed that he would be happy to deal with which ever size of group Mr Robinson suggested; he could see the arguments in both directions.

5. Turning to the agenda both Mr Robinson and Mr Wilson reaffirmed that the first task must be to deal with the obstacle of the Anglo-Irish Agreement; whatever stemmed from that lay in the future. Mr Burns envisaged three layers to the discussion:-

- (i) The relationship between the discussions and the Agreement (and any other possible obstacles):

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- (ii) In the light of what transpired on the first point, sensible mechanics for substantive talks; and
- (iii) The agenda for any such substantive talks, bearing in mind that it would be necessary to consider simultaneously both how Northern Ireland should be governed and also relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

5. Mr Wilson confirmed that everyone agreed to this, and added that a further item for discussion should be the way in which any ultimate agreement should be validated by "the people".

6. Mr Robinson picked up this last point and recalled his reaction to John Hume's proposal that referenda should be held north and south of the border. He felt that the SDLP had floated this as a quid pro quo for suspension of the Agreement. He for his part would have serious difficulties in making the internal structure of Northern Ireland subject to a vote in the Republic of Ireland; but he thought the concept was valid in connection with the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic. He fully accepted that Dr Paisley's public position that the internal structure of Northern Ireland should be settled before working out its relationship with the Republic was not realistic. Nor however was the SDLP view that the process should operate in reverse. It was necessary to have a simultaneous package covering both elements. He himself had been trying to acclimatise unionist opinion to this political fact of life, which however many people found it difficult to accept.

7. The discussion then touched briefly on other political parties. Mr Robinson and Mr Wilson confirmed that there had as yet been no UUP reaction to the DUP's announcement that they would be talking to NIO officials. In answer to a question, Mr Burns said that NI Conservatives' affiliation to the mainland party would make no difference to HMG's policy on Northern Ireland. The NI Conservatives would have very little influence in the party as a

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whole, and government policy on Northern Ireland would continue to be made by Ministers rather than by Dr Kennedy. Mr Robinson felt that the Conservatives would have a honeymoon period in Northern Ireland, and that people genuinely believed things were changing. The Conservatives would make inroads into the UUP vote and draw some support from the Alliance; their effect on the DUP would be nil.

8. It was agreed that once the initial obstacle to talks had been circumvented other parties should be brought in as soon as possible; but until that point had been reached the present discussions would involve only the DUP and the NIO. At the appropriate time it might be best for the DUP to bring the UUP into the picture, and for the NIO to talk to the SDLP; this might not be how things should be handled in strict theory but it could well be the way most likely to succeed. Mr Burns said that he hoped all parties would examine everything carefully; there would be no merit in anyone feeling he had been conned.

9. Mr Robinson raised the question of what could be said to others at this stage. While it would be better to keep the content of the talks confidential at this stage, it was important to avoid the stigma of 'security talks' and there was nothing to stop participants "chatting casually" to others. Mr Burns said that the NIO was relaxed about this and it was not our practice to respond to public questions about private discussions; if approached by the Press or by other parties, the NIO would refuse to be drawn and would simply stick to the line that the office remained in contact with all Northern Ireland political parties. Mr Robinson confirmed that the DUP would take a similar approach. The best time to go public fully would be kept under review.

10. Turning to the future agenda, Mr Robinson asked if what had been discussed at the meeting could be gone over again before a wider DUP audience, following which DUP representation would revert to himself and Mr Wilson. Recalling the earlier discussion (paragraph 4) Mr Burns agreed - the next meeting would quite deliberately go over

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the same ground again with the larger DUP team. The aim of the next meeting should be to identify the obstacle to substantive talks, to agree an agenda for discussing the way forward and to remit matters to the smaller group reporting back as necessary.

11. Finally there was a brief tentative discussion on what the way forward might be. Mr Burns reiterated that nothing was ruled out; any proposals with which the unionists and the SDLP were content would automatically be regarded as worthy of serious consideration by Government. It followed that this ruled out neither continuation of the Duisberg process (which Mr Robinson had trailed) nor building on the conclusion of last year's "talks about talks". These were however policy questions which would necessitate Ministers being brought into play. Mr Robinson commented that the unionist parties were now less sensitive about the Anglo-Irish Agreement and no longer felt the need continually to stress that it must be replaced. For that reason the formula reached at the end of the "talks about talks" might provide a basis. In any event they were content to continue this exploratory process.

12. The meeting was friendly and constructive throughout, finishing at around 6.15 pm. It was agreed that the next meeting, at which the DUP would field a wider team, would be held as soon as diary commitments on both sides permitted, probably on 25 or 26 October.

13. For the sake of convenience, although neither text was on the table, the Duisberg formula and the phraseology used at the end of "talks about talks" are attached to this note.

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