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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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18 April 1980

Dear Michael

Prime Minister

This is, in effect, a preliminary brief for your meeting with Mr Powell (You will see that Mr Atkins hopes you will see Mr Polymeaux first.)

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR ENOCH POWELL

We agreed last night that it would be impracticable to provide a full brief for this meeting by this evening: both Mr Atkins and the Prime Minister wished to reflect further about the dangers of our position and how best to meet them. I can, however, set out some background which my Secretary of State thinks the Prime Minister may wish to consider over the weekend. You may then want to direct our attention to particular points when we prepare the brief itself.

Mr Atkins explained to the Prime Minister last night that with his approval Ken Stowe recently had a discussion with Enoch Powell. At the end of it the latter unveiled his assertion that there was an agreement with Mr Airey Neave on 28 March 1979 at 9.30 pm, just before the confidence vote. Mr Powell, we presume, intends at least to press upon the Prime Minister the merits, as he sees them, of this agreement and his objections to the Government's course. Ken Stowe's record of his discussion with Mr Powell (including the supplementary note recording separately this particular point) which is enclosed (marked A) gives some indication of Mr Powell's line of thinking (which would, of course, be very much more controversial in Northern Ireland than he implies).

We have no detailed account of any agreement. It now looks, however, as if in the eyes of Mr Powell at least the words in the Conservative Manifesto have had a different (and more specific) meaning from that which we had supposed. It said "In the absence of devolved government, we will seek to establish one or more elected regional councils with a wide range of powers over local services". The Government's policy, from the Queen's Speech, through the Conference and since, is to pursue the first limb of that phrase openly, without prejudice, and constructively. In Mr Powell's eyes, however, the first limb is merely a formality to be got out of the way so that the real objective, the regional councils, can be approached. Indeed,

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to him the first limb of the phrase may merely be a description of the present position, not a condition to be satisfied if regional councils are to be attempted. Whether Mr Molyneux and the party generally share Mr Powell's understanding we do not know.

There are obvious and compelling reasons why we cannot now jettison Government policy and move to the second limb of the phrase in the Manifesto. First, all the participants at the Conference made quite clear, as Mr Atkins told the Cabinet on 24 January, that they do not want a local government solution but a devolved administration with real powers over policy and would wreck a local government solution if it was tried. So it is impossible for the Government quietly to steer down the sort of route which Mr Powell seems to want: and it is even more inconceivable to go down it if he were to attempt to twist the Government's arm under threat of publicising the agreement, which we are no longer in a position to deny (without calling Mr Powell a liar). Secondly, quite apart from the evidence that any sort of local government solution would be unacceptable, a move in that direction could in itself be enough to re-open allegations of a predetermined plan which, in good faith and broadly successfully, we have strenuously denied. Such allegations, or worse still deliberate publicity from the Ulster Unionist Party of a "deal", would call in question the Government's credibility and good faith in all its dealings on Northern Ireland. It is difficult to think of a more welcome gift to the Provisional IRA than plausible, indeed undeniable, claims that we had misled the SDLP and the Catholic community. The damage to confidence, and therefore the implications for the security situation, would be appalling: unsatisfactory though direct rule is, it is tolerable because of a basic belief in fair dealing by the Westminster government. If we were to shake that belief, the consequences would be likely to be measured in men's lives.

Thirdly, there are the international ramifications. Although it was no more than a summary of what has been said separately before, in Dublin earlier this week the Secretary of State set out seven points upon which the Government's approach is based. The Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs noted them carefully, and they have been reported repeatedly in press accounts of the meeting. Several of them would be wholly inconsistent with any implementation of an agreement with the Ulster Unionist Party, at least according to the impression which Mr Powell gives of that agreement. The text of these points, in the terms in which they were put to Mr Lenihan in ... Dublin on Tuesday, is enclosed (marked B).

The timing of Mr Powell's approach is not coincidental. The Secretary of State has announced that, following the adjournment of the Conference, the Government is considering the next steps (indeed, one of today's meetings in Belfast has been called by the Secretary of State to settle the lines of a paper for MISC 24).

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A number of factors, including this latest development, suggest that the Government will need a little time to consider their next public step on political policy for Northern Ireland. Even without this development, the crucial question was how to bring in the Ulster Unionist Party. It might not be possible, though desirable, to attract them into a new session of the Conference. It would be essential to get them to adopt a positive and constructive attitude towards the Government's next step: they are on record as saying that they would support the Government in carrying out its Manifesto. If the Manifesto means something different to them, the problem of how to attract their support or at least acquiescence becomes much more difficult. That will be a crucial element in briefing the Prime Minister for a meeting with Mr Molyneaux or Mr Powell. The Secretary of State wishes to submit further advice on that, after his discussion with MISC 24 (now planned for 30 April). But he is quite clear that the first person in the Ulster Unionist Party the Prime Minister should see about this matter is James Molyneaux. We believe he is better informed than Mr Powell about the feelings of people in Northern Ireland and does not suffer from prejudices on constitutional matters which could blind him to reason on the political implications of what Mr Powell may now be arguing for. He may well not know exactly what Mr Powell is arguing for: it is significant that any agreement was reached with Mr Powell, and the Prime Minister could expect to learn much about how to deal with Mr Powell from a discussion with Mr Molyneaux. Above all, Mr Molyneaux is the leader of the party: we may need his reasonableness, and the Prime Minister could weaken his position by going behind his back.

Yours Sincerely

John Hopton

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NOTEMEETING WITH MR POWELL

Mr Powell made one comment in our conversation on 31 March which I have not recorded in my record of the meeting. Below. When, at the close, he spoke of his intention to seek a meeting with the Prime Minister he referred to the fear among the Official Unionist MPs that they were being betrayed (although he did not use this precise word) by the Government. What he said was that they were concerned that the Government seemed to be backing away from the very plain agreement which he had reached with Mr Airey Neave at 9.30 pm in Mr Neave's room in the House of Commons on 28 March in return for which the Official Unionists had agreed to support the Opposition and so bring down the Labour Government. He did not specify what this agreement was but the implication was clear, that the Government's policy towards Northern Ireland would be a Unionist policy leading towards integration rather than devolution. I was struck by the stark clarity and precise terms in which Mr Powell referred to his agreement with Mr Neave. I was also struck by the fact that he seemed not to assume that the Secretary of State was a party to, or even aware of this agreement, but plainly indicated that the Prime Minister was, hence his decision that he must go to see her.

(Sgd) KRS

K R Stowe
15 April 1980

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING WITH MR. ENOCH POWELL

At Mr. Powell's request I saw him on Monday 31 March (meeting broken off to attend the Prime Minister's meeting at 10 Downing Street) and again on the afternoon of Thursday 3 April - in total about 2 hours of solid talk about political policy in Northern Ireland.

2. Mr. Powell began by asking me 2 questions. First, was the Government rock-solid on defence of the union or was it not? Secondly, could I now (sic) tell him what had gone wrong about the meeting between Mr. Atkins and Mr. Molyneux on Monday 22 October (when Mr. Molyneux was left with the impression that no Government action was intended whereas Mr. Atkins thought he was conveying that a Government announcement to convene a conference was imminent.)

3. On the first I said that there was no doubt about the Government's position on this, both privately and publicly they were clear that they were not seeking to break up the union of the United Kingdom but were defending it against its attackers. Mr. Powell's response was to say that he was reassured because it meant that he had only "miscomprehension" and not malice to deal with. On the second I told him again what I told him before as to the events on that day and said we had better agree to write that meeting off as a total failure of communication between 2 people who each thought he had heard and said things different from what the other thought. I pressed on him that there was no plot in it at all.

4. Mr. Powell then said that he did not understand why the Government had made its move with the Conference. All the arguments surely were to take no initiative, to create no disturbance, and to leave passions to subside and events to

take their course. I said that au contraire Ministers judged that it was timely to make a move and we then discussed the considerations which might have justified their doing so, none of which seemed to make much impact on Mr. Powell. At this point the first meeting broke off.

5. At the second meeting I began by saying that it seemed clear to me that I was not going to convince him that Ministers actions had been well founded, and I doubted whether anything he said to me when reported (as he knew it would be) to my Secretary of State would convince Ministers that they were wrong. Nevertheless, I was pleased to continue these conversations with him, with the Secretary of State's consent because I found them helpful and stimulating. He said that he would find it helpful to hear from me the considerations which bore on the Government's policies as I saw them because he did not wish to make speeches or to comment on Government proposals from a position of ignorance or misunderstanding - the issues were too serious.

6. He then took up the point at which we had broken off, namely why did Ministers believe it was right to move now? Were they, he asked, deceiving themselves into thinking that there were "glittering prizes" to be won for he was clear that that was an illusion.

7. I replied that there were no wild illusions, nor expectations of "glittering prizes" but a solid conviction on the part of Ministers that the present position was itself unstable and unviable, not because of criticism from abroad but because of its intrinsic weaknesses. He challenged me on this and said that it seemed not so to him - and indeed by making a move all the Government had succeeded in doing with the Unionist Party was to compel them to reiterate the Convention report. They had no alternative but it would have been much better if they had never been required to re-confirm their commitment to that document.

8. I then took Mr. Powell through some of the reasons why as I saw it Ministers found the present position defective. I mentioned 3 elements: the bizarre arrangements for legislation on Northern Ireland now operated; the disconnection of Ministers' responsibility for local administration from any constituency support in the Province; and the need to give local politicians material with which to ply their trade.

9. On legislation Mr Powell took my point that he was one of the foremost critics of the present arrangements and said that the right course was to legislate for Northern Ireland as we had for Scotland, ie by means of UK legislation with special provisions for Northern Ireland where appropriate, the whole process taking place in the ordinary way in Westminster. As regards the gap between Ministers and the local administration for which they were responsible, and the influence of any local electorate, he said that if events were allowed to take their course then we would hope to see a new structure of politics developing in Northern Ireland under which the political parties would divide as they did in GB, and so it would be possible to provide for at least one Northern Ireland MP out of 17 in the next Parliament, on whatever was the winning side, to be the Minister of State responsible for Northern Ireland affairs in the relevant Whitehall department. He went on to say that meanwhile Ministers should cease to take so many local decisions, for which they were accountable to no constituency, by handing down powers, starting with planning powers, to district councils. As regards the aspirations of local politicians he thought that a first and simple step could be made by providing for elections to the regional bodies like the Housing Executive, the Health and Social Services Boards and the Education and Library Boards - he gave a good testimony to the efficient administration of some at least of these bodies, in particular the Housing Executive.

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10. I did not comment on Mr Powell's responses and in particular forbore from pointing out that each of his proposed measures could in no way be described as leaving things alone and allowing passions to cool!

11. Mr Powell, during the course of discussion made some interesting comments about the Official Unionist Party. He explained that it was only the old style Unionist from the landed gentry who had been enthusiastic for Stormont and they had brought their own destruction down on their heads by their follies; that the ordinary Unionist people differentiated quite sharply between their loyalty to the union and their regard for Stormont, which most of them despised as a charade; that this was very much the attitude of the younger leading Unionists; that in consequence of the collapse of the Unionist Party in 1974 and its disintegration, unionism old style had been decapitated; its old guard had gone and there were no serious contenders for the modern leadership under Jim Molyneaux. He anathematised the feudal gentry who had sat at the top of the Unionist Party for half a century; emphasised that they were no longer in power and need not be regarded as of significance; and added caustically that he himself would never be invited to their black-tie dinner parties, nor would he want to go. The burden of all this was that Ministers should not be deceived by anarchistic survivors into believing that there was any desire for the old Stormont government to be returned.

12. At the end of the meeting Mr Powell said that he now saw what he had to do. There were grave dangers of the Government committing itself to the wrong course through misunderstanding and he would have to ask to see the Prime Minister. (NB He did not attempt to dress this up as advising his leader to see the Prime Minister but spoke plainly in the first person.)

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13. I registered with Mr Powell before leaving, my belief that the unfortunate misunderstanding between Mr Molyneaux and the Secretary of State could now be "exorcised": he responded that he was not sure about that but that it had better be forgotten. I also registered that this conversation was of course wholly private as between the two of us but he will be likely to use it in consultation with Mr Molyneaux and I would report on it to the Secretary of State.

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K R STOWE

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1. The Government were quite determined that the present position in Northern Ireland, where the Province was run by a ministerial team who did not represent Northern Ireland, must come to an end. It presented the additional difficulty that political life within the Province withered away. The Government felt the time was right to move.
2. The basis for the current initiative, and the principles upon which any move would be based, had been set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Government's consultation document prepared for the Conference. Those principles were accepted by all those at the Conference.
3. The Government hoped it was now firmly established that they had not gone into the Conference with a "secret plan" up their sleeves: the process of consultation which was going on was entirely genuine.
4. A solution in Northern Ireland could not be imposed. One could not hope to find a solution that would win unqualified support on all sides, and no party in Northern Ireland could expect to get all it wanted. The Government were aiming to find a solution in which the majority of people in Northern Ireland would at least acquiesce.
5. The aim was to restore democratic control. It was not yet possible to determine to what final destination political development in the Province might eventually lead. For the moment the Government were concentrating on taking the first steps. The Irish Government needed to recognise that the British Government were not in the business of promoting Irish unity. Quite apart from anything else, all political progress would immediately collapse. On the other hand, the British Government were not erecting obstacles to that ultimate destination if that proved to be what the people of Northern Ireland eventually wanted.
6. The over-riding principle was that the choice must be made by the people of Northern Ireland, and that in turn meant that the first step along the road to a solution must take place in Northern Ireland. It was quite impossible for the process to start in or in consultation with Dublin because that would put an immediate stop to the process. The Irish Government should recognise the very real apprehensions of the Protestant community over links with the Republic. Those apprehensions might be unjustified, but as a political factor in Northern Ireland there was no doubt that they existed.
7. The Government would carry forward step by step the process they had begun.