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Dear Clive,

Ian Gow and Philip Goodhart are to have lunch on Wednesday 2 April with Enoch Powell. As Powell is the principal and most effective opponent of the Government's present initiative on Northern Ireland as represented by the recently adjourned political Conference, and is widely regarded here as the Svengali to Jim Molyneaux's Trilby, he will require rather careful handling. Ian Gow might welcome some general guidance on the line which it would be helpful for him to take with Powell.

The Powell line is of course integrationist. He would say that since Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom there is no need for it to be treated any differently from any other part of the United Kingdom, ie no need for a devolved government but a case to be made for giving greater powers to local government. If he is allowed to get away with this simplistic argument the logic of his opposition to the Government's policies, and hence to the Official Unionists attendance at the Conference follows. His first premise is of course wrong. Other parts of the United Kingdom do not have 20,000 soldiers deployed on active service nor the historic precedent of having had their own devolved government until eight years ago. What is more, all the Parties represented at the Conference and everyone else that the Secretary of State has consulted, other than the leadership (but by no means all the membership) of the Official Unionist Party, have made it abundantly clear that they want, and the electorate they represent want, a devolved government with legislative and executive powers.

The message we want the Official Unionist Party to receive therefore is that the Government is determined to continue along its chosen course of establishing by a process of discussion, of which the Conference was only the first stage, what level of agreement can be reached on the nature and extent of powers to be devolved and of the Assembly to be established. It is in the Government's interest and in the interest of the Official Unionist Party that Mr Powell and his friends should not strand themselves

like a whale on a sand-bank as the process of discussion goes ahead. We have no desire to introduce structures of government here which are not acceptable to the electorate, of which the Official Unionist Party represent a third, and we need to have their contribution.

It has been made clear to Mr Powell that the Government is not trying to undermine the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, nor trying to undermine the position of the Official Unionist Party by leaving them isolated from political discussions. They are quite clear, however, that Direct Rule in its present form cannot and should not continue and that there must be a transfer of responsibilities to locally elected representatives of the Province so as to form a Northern Ireland administration within the sovereign state of the United Kingdom. The Government, for its part, will not leave the Official Unionists stranded, and have very much in mind how best to engage them in discussion when their own proposals are put forward. But they do not believe that it is either possible or desirable to find a solution to all that has gone before in the history of Northern Ireland by simply treating it as any other part of the United Kingdom in the hope that its inherent structural problems will then fade away.

Mr Gow is probably aware that Enoch Powell buttresses his integrationist argument by asserting that Ministers are not to blame for their inability to perceive the truth of what he propounds because they have been badly advised by people from the Foreign Office and the UK Home Civil Service who know nothing about Northern Ireland. We believe that Mr Powell now understands that it is in fact deliberate policy on the part of the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that official expertise of the Province is fully engaged in consideration of the future of the Province and this has been the practice throughout the period during which the present Government has developed its proposals. The Head of the NICS, Ewart Bell, sits at the Secretary of State's left hand at the Conference table.

Finally, Mr Gow should be aware of an important point which the Government will have to take into account in any contacts with the Official Unionist Party - even including such discussions as will take place over lunch. We should not advertise the point to Mr Powell but the Conference was much exercised about the Government negotiating privately with the OUP and on 29 February the Secretary of State gave them an assurance in the following terms:

"The Secretary of State made it clear, in response to the political parties attending the Conference, that, although the invitation to the Official Unionist Party to participate in the Conference still stood, and they would be welcome to play their part in the

discussions, neither he nor his officials would be engaging in separate talks with the Official Unionist Party during the Conference about the subject matter of the Conference. As he had already told the House of Commons, the Government intended to put before Parliament proposals on the future government of Northern Ireland formulated in the light of the Conference, and would consult a wide range of opinion in the Province before doing so. But the Government had given no commitment to any party about the content or timing of such consultations."

Mr Gow will wish to bear this in mind if conversation goes back to the Conference.

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

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R A HARRINGTON



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