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LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

27 January 1992

Dear Christopher,

CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER BY THE LEADER
OF THE IRISH OPPOSITION: MR. JOHN BRUTON
27 JANUARY

Thank you for your letter of 24 January enclosing briefing for Mr. Bruton's call on the Prime Minister which took place today. Most of the discussion was about European issues, notably the EDG's membership of the EPP. I am recording that separately.

On Irish domestic matters Mr. Bruton thought that Mr. Haughey would probably resign but it was not a certainty. The Progressive Democrats were signed on for the budget and could not therefore credibly vote against any of the consequent legislation. Mr. Haughey was a very astute politician who was deceptively passive. He could last for another month or two. In due course, Mr. Bruton thought that there would be a fight for the leadership between Albert Reynolds and the Finance Minister, Mr. Ahern. Mary O'Rourke, Michael Woods and Gerry Collins might also be candidates but he thought it would boil down to a Reynolds versus Ahern contest with Ahern winning. Reynolds had been too overtly the one trying to topple the leader. Moreover, Ahern was from Dublin and therefore addressed a weak point in Fianna Fail's armoury. Mr. Bruton said he did not expect an election until 1993. Indeed, with his own party languishing in the polls he felt rather ambivalent about an early election. If there were an early election he thought that all politicians could suffer from the general anti-political mood of the country. Under the PR system that kind of atmosphere tended to bring maverick parties to the fore. He would prefer a normal period of politics before an election took place.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Bruton said that his Party was very appreciative of Mr. Brooke's efforts to bring the parties to the table. Mr Brooke had been patient and persevering. He hoped something would come of it.

The Prime Minister said that he had publicly and privately urged the Unionists to return to the negotiating table. There was no excuse - certainly not the General Election - for not getting round the table. When people were getting blown up, urgency was required. Mr. Bruton commented that the Unionists wanted to pause at the general election. The Prime Minister said that the Unionists were very edgy about the implications for them of a Labour Government. Mr. Bruton commented that Labour's

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objective of a united Ireland might actually prejudice people against the negotiating process even before it began. He hoped it would not stand in the way of progress.

I am copying this letter to William Fittall (Northern Ireland Office) and Paul Regan (Minister of State, Home Office).

27 January 1992

*Jani,
Stephen*

J. S. WALL

Christopher Prentice, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office