

**SUBJECT
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SECRET AND PERSONAL

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cc Rod Lyne

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From the Principal Private Secretary

13 December 1993

JOINT DECLARATION: MEETING WITH MOLYNEAUX

No further copies should be made of this letter, and it should be made available only to other Ministers and officials with a strict need to know of its contents.

The Prime Minister and Michael Ancram had a meeting this evening at 9.30 pm with Jim Molyneux, lasting about an hour. Mr Molyneux was clearly somewhat nervous when the meeting started but warmed up during the meeting (only tea was served!) and by the end was in much better heart.

The Prime Minister started by explaining that the latest text of the Joint Declaration was still not finally agreed with the Irish Government. No points of principle had been conceded, and there were more pluses than minuses. But the position was being made harder by selective leaking by the Irish. The Irish had also heard word that Mr Molyneux was not as opposed to the Convention as they had been lead to believe, and this had prompted them to fight hard for its retention. Assuming that could be sorted out, the Prime Minister thought that even though it would be possible in theory to abort the process now, that would be very difficult given the concessions that the Irish Government had made.

The next steps were to negotiate the best possible wording with the Irish Government but then not to delay an announcement: the leaks were making it harder day by day. After a Parliamentary Statement he planned to do a Ministerial broadcast straight to camera.

Mr Molyneux said he remained nervous about some of the phraseology. References to "the people of the island of Ireland alone" stirred up fears that the

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Government was washing its hands of responsibility, whereas the sense to be conveyed was "unhindered" rather than "alone". But he saw the difficulties if the process was aborted. One of his continuing concerns was the risk that Gerry Adams would call a ceasefire and then demand conditions to keep it going.

There was some discussion about the possibility of talking to other Unionists either before or after the statement. Mr Molyneaux thought it would be a good idea for your Secretary of State to see Ken Maginnis and take him through the issues carefully. The Prime Minister and Mr Molyneaux toyed with the idea of seeing Ian Paisley before a Parliamentary Statement but concluded that that would not work since he would simply go straight out in the street and denounce it. It was agreed that the Prime Minister would offer to see the Ulster Unionist MPs, the Democratic Unionists MPs and indeed the SDLP MPs straight after his statement if they wished. The Prime Minister also suggested that in his statement he might offer formal and regular meetings with Northern Ireland constitutional parties so as to clear up any misunderstandings and to explain the position as it developed. Mr Molyneaux thought this would be a good idea; but it should be a positive invitation, and not simply a throw away line that the door was always open.

There was some discussion of the drafting. Mr Molyneaux wondered whether it would not be possible to include a phrase which the Prime Minister had used at a previous meeting, that the future of Northern Ireland was "for the people of Northern Ireland and no-one else". But he did not press it when taken through the various references to the Constitutional guarantee and the need for consent. Mr Molyneaux said he could not understand where the Irish Government had got the idea that he was softening his line on a Convention or forum. Michael Ancram read out the proposed sentence about the Irish Government making its own arrangements, and this met with a very positive "hmmm" from Mr Molyneaux. Mr Molyneaux also thought it was a great advance to have got the words "the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland" into the text: this was a preferred phrase to his, which he had used at several party conferences, and was much better than "majority". Mr Molyneaux also hankered after getting "assist" out; the Prime Minister said we were trying to get "assist and enable" replaced by "and facilitate".

The Prime Minister asked Mr Molyneaux what his views were about the timing of an announcement on a Select Committee. Mr Molyneaux said that Peter Robinson had been alleging that the UUP had been bought by the bauble of a Select Committee. He therefore thought it was better to outsmart this by

delaying an announcement. An early announcement would not make any difference to the acceptance of the Joint Declaration. The Prime Minister agreed that a formal announcement should be delayed until Parliament returned in January, though indications of the Government's attitude might be given earlier.

The Prime Minister asked what line your Secretary of State should take with Mr Maginnis, especially if he was asked how much of the detail Mr Molyneaux knew. Mr Molyneaux said that he had made no secret of the fact that his advice had occasionally been sought and given. Mr Maginnis would assume that Mr Molyneaux would have had some sight of certain papers, though he would not have been expected to give his approval. There was no harm in explaining this to Mr Maginnis. It was important, however, to indicate to Mr Maginnis that the scope for changing the wording of the Declaration at this stage was almost non-existent. For this reason, it was better not to take any other UUP members through the text: they would inevitably want to try to rewrite it. The Prime Minister added that your Secretary of State should also take Mr Maginnis through the consequences of aborting the Joint Declaration at this stage. The result would be that the Irish Government would denounce the British Government and the Unionists; it would publish its version of the text and there was a danger it would win international support. In the long run, this could be very damaging for the Union.

The Prime Minister asked Mr Molyneaux what line he would take after an announcement in the House of Commons. Mr Molyneaux said he would say that, like all the other parties, his advice had been sought from time to time. If asked whether he had seen documents, he would admit that he had read a most illuminating document published in the Irish press! On the Joint Declaration itself, he would say it was a complex document that needed to be studied carefully. As a Unionist, there were certain bits he did not like; but, when asked, he would then go on to explain the bits he did like. He would also be ready to talk to editors in Northern Ireland to explain his reading of certain key phrases. The Prime Minister said this would be extremely helpful: editors would listen to Mr Molyneaux's interpretations in a way which they might not take from the Government. An even handed approach, pointing out the pluses as well as the minuses, was all the Government could ask. Mr Molyneaux added that the bits he disliked were in any case not enforceable in the way they were under the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr Molyneaux, warming to the up-side of the Joint Declaration, said that if the Prime Minister got through this successfully, he would be in a much more powerful position than predecessors to rebuild and strengthen the Union. He

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would not be beholden to the Irish Government in the same way. His parting comment was to say that he very much hoped it would be possible to get rid of the paragraphs referring to the Convention: that was the single biggest obstacle (he made it clear that the alternative single sentence was acceptable).

I am copying this letter to Melanie Leech (Cabinet Office) and to Keith Jagelman (Michael Ancram's office, NIO).

ALEX ALLAN

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