



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Press Release

From: The Ulster Unionist Parliamentary Party,
Amended until: 10:00 a.m., 16/2/95

Text of letter sent by Ulster Unionist MPs to the Prime Minister, 14/2/95

Thank you for agreeing to meet us this morning and for spending so much time in outlining the current position with regard to the framework document.

We are sorry to say that the discussion has done nothing to dispel our concerns. On the contrary it has confirmed the suspicion, voiced by our Party Chairman in a statement earlier today that "London, Dublin and the pan-nationalist front ... are aiming for a bridge too far." As Jim Nicholson says in that statement, "If the negotiators believe that Unionists can be brought off by some useless Assembly at Stormont that has no freedom to determine how it can order its own affairs, they are gravely mistaken."

Michael Ancram MP this morning referred to a letter dated 14th October 1994 from our team for dealing with the internal government of Northern Ireland. He quoted the first sentence of the penultimate paragraph of that letter. The whole paragraph is relevant. In it Jim Nicholson MEP, Reg Empey and Jeffrey Donaldson say,

"We remain totally dissatisfied with the present handling of the framework document process. We are unaware of the contents of the various drafts and find it repugnant that representatives of the Irish Government and we believe the SDLP and Sinn Féin are in possession of HMG's thinking on these matters and we as the largest political party in Northern Ireland are kept in ignorance. This is intolerable.

It was because there was no improvement in that intolerable situation that the authors of the letter concluded, after a meeting with Michael Ancram MP the following month, that there was no point in continuing contact with him.

This morning we were made aware of some of HMG's thinking and we can now see why Michael was so reluctant to be open with our internal government team. For that team had made it clear that the sort of North/South body now proposed would be unacceptable to Unionists, as can be seen from the following letters sent by them to Michael Ancram MP:

"The Ulster Unionist Party will not support any proposal which envisages the establishment by the two governments of statutory North-South

15/07/1995 17:25 R/12156850

(U P H O O)

0712156850
15 FEB '95 17:25

institutions or bodies to discharge or oversee a range of executive functions on matters which they decide will be administered uniformly through the island. It is our view that any structures to facilitate North-South co-operation must be established by agreement between, and derive their authority from, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Dail."
[letter to Michael Antrim dated 12th August 1994]

"We will not lend our support to any proposal which envisages the establishment of statutory North/South institutions or bodies with the capacity to administer executive functions delegated by mutual agreement and legislation of the British and Irish governments. It is our view that any structures to facilitate North/South co-operation must be established by agreement between, and derive their authority from, an Assembly and the Dail."
[response to the Notions document of 1994]

As our leader, the Rt Hon James Moynihan MP, made clear on the Inside Politics programme on 21st January 1995, proposals that would impose on Assembly members a "duty of service" with regard to the North/South body, and which would provide default and override powers enabling Dublin to raise the internal workings of the Assembly and any failure to co-operate within the North/South body before the Intergovernmental conference, in the expectation that UUP would discipline recalcitrant unionists, amounts to joint authority "in a particularly hideous form."

It is especially unfortunate that the two governments have not tried to build on the repeated willingness of Unionists to discuss co-operation in the full knowledge that that might lead to joint action if agreeable to the Irish government and the new administration in Northern Ireland. Such willingness is implicit in the above extracts and was made clear in a letter from the Rt Hon James H Moynihan MP and the Rev Ian R K Paisley MP to the then Prime Minister, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP on 28th August 1985,

"Provided United Kingdom sovereignty remains undiminished, and provided that the Republic's territorial claim is withdrawn, we are willing to contribute to a process of British/Irish discussion and co-operation;
(a) as members of a newly formed Government of Northern Ireland meeting with opposite numbers in the Government of the Irish Republic to consider matters of mutual interest and concern within the purview of respective departmental responsibilities; and
(b) as members of a devolved government comprising part of a United Kingdom delegation to talks with the Government of the Irish Republic about matters of mutual interest and concern to both States exclusive of those matters referred to in (a) above, and those touching on United Kingdom sovereignty over Northern Ireland."

This offer, however, was based on the assumption that there would be an effective devolved administration in Northern Ireland.

We could not proceed with the co-operation envisaged in the letter of August 1985 on the basis of an Assembly so centred by checks and balances and blocking powers that it was ineffective. Even if

the Assembly were as we would propose there remains the point made in today's statement by Jim Nicholson MRP.

We are Unionists. We wish to maintain the Union between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. We wish to repair the damage done to that Union by the ill considered Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. The creation of all-Ireland political institutions with governmental powers to treat Ireland as one unit for any matter is the antithesis of Unionism. Co-operation and even cross border bodies, properly defined, are one thing; all-Ireland bodies are quite another matter. And no amount of tinkering with the Irish constitution can make such a contradiction of Unionism palatable.

We want to see what the framework document will actually contain when it is published. However, we must point out that a framework document consisting of the proposals which we have indicated is completely unacceptable and would not provide a basis for political progress and we will have to advise our party accordingly. While we remain willing to discuss our own reasonable proposals, we would not be able to enter into talks on the basis of an agenda which we regard to be a one-sided nationalist agenda. As we said to you this morning, we heard nothing that would be welcomed by Unionists.

It is a matter of profound regret to us that what might be a good chance of resolving our troubles is being destroyed by nationalist greed and intransigence.

Sincerely,

William Ross MP W Martin Smyth MP David Trimble MP