

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

13 March 1991

For Andy,

I know that you have taken a great personal interest in the lengthy discussions which Peter Brooke, Gerry Collins and the leaders of the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland have been holding over the last fourteen months. I am grateful for the timely interventions by which you have, on several occasions, cleared the way for further progress.

Peter discussed this with Gerry Collins on 11 March. It is common ground that we need before long to bring matters to a resolution, and that we should aim to do this before the next Inter-Governmental Conference, which it is now envisaged will take place on 9 April. It was also accepted that we should seek to avoid a situation in which your Government was invited to agree to a text which the Northern Ireland parties would subsequently be free to amend or reject. In the light of this discussion and recent contacts with all concerned Peter has now prepared a text for a statement which represents his own best judgement of what would be a basis for talks that safeguards the genuine concerns of the potential participants including, of course, your own Government. Nearly all of the substance and much of the language of this document will already be familiar to you; it draws directly from the extremely helpful draft which your Government put forward on 6 February; elements owe their provenance to Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley and to Mr Hume and his colleagues. It aims to provide a basis on which all the parties can move forward into the three strands of substantive talks.

CONFIDENTIAL

IDS take

My colleagues and I have given this matter our most careful consideration. We conclude that we have reached the point where we should either proceed to formal talks, or acknowledge that it is, at present, impossible to do so. I very much hope that you will share our view that the document adequately accommodates the essential principles of all concerned. I believe that it provides a good basis from which talks comprising all three elements identified in the paper can be successfully launched. These could provide the framework for the development of new and imaginative thinking such as you referred to in your speech on 9 March. They offer the means by which all might agree to a strengthening of the democratic procedures that all see as desirable. That is why I am writing personally to commend to you and to your colleagues the document which Peter has prepared and to seek your continued support.

The document will be sent to the four party leaders on Thursday 14 March so that it reaches them simultaneously. I should be most grateful if you would preserve the confidentiality of this communication at least until that has happened. Peter will explain that while the text may not be regarded as ideal by any participant we do not intend to amend it or to have further negotiations on it. I hope that they will also feel able to give their endorsement to the approach Peter outlines. We shall make it known that this has been handed over but that it is not our intention to publish the document at this stage; and we will suggest that all concerned continue to respect its confidentiality while they consider it. Of course, should the press begin to publish selected or distorted passages then, in order to preserve the integrity of the process, it might be necessary for us to publish the text in full ourselves. If Peter is not able to make the statement because one of the potential participants is not satisfied that it represents an acceptable basis for formal talks we will in any event release the text as a record of the conclusions which we as a Government have drawn from the exchanges of the past fourteen months.

Mr Charles J Haughey TD
An Taoiseach

In order to maintain the momentum with the Northern Ireland parties in the light of the Parliamentary timetable, they will be asked to give their reactions by 26 March. Peter is sending a separate note to Gerry Collins in the United States with a copy of the text and suggesting a further informal meeting as soon as he returns. If, as I hope, there is no objection, it would then be possible for Peter to make this statement in the House of Commons on 27 March. He could discuss with Gerry Collins whether, as partners in this enterprise, you would wish to be associated with this announcement and, if so, how that might be achieved.

1. I had a conversation on 8 March 1991 with Paddy Doherty, Community Employment Director in Derry. Doherty is someone who is well known in the Nationalist areas of Derry and formerly was a close associate of Mitchell McLaughlin (present chairman of Sinn Fein) in community employment activities. He is well known to Martin McGuinness. Doherty and Mitchell McLaughlin know me of old and McLaughlin knows that I contact Doherty from time to time.

2. Some weeks ago Doherty and I discussed the current state of play in Republican circles. This was a straightforward discussion during which we covered predictable areas such as the British Presence speech, the Christmas ceasefire, Sinn Fein Ard Fheis and the continuing PIRA campaign including the Downing Street attack. During that discussion I had taken a fairly provocative line and pointed out that while there may be some contrary signals the Provisionals did seem to be determined to keep up the campaign of violence, and in terms of political development did not seem to have moved much beyond a straightforward demand for a British withdrawal. I had also suggested that the Provisionals would regularly sell out if they thought that any Government could accept their agenda without taking account of a substantial risk that that could produce a hostile reaction among the Unionists in Northern Ireland, some very people in the rest of Great Britain and indeed among some people in the wider international community. During that discussion there was no suggestion that I was stating views for consideration by the republican movement.

*Yours sincerely,
Peter*

Mr Charles J Haughey TD
An Taoiseach