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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

SUBJECT
MASTER

Filed on:

From the Private Secretary

10 June 1996

Dear Mr. [unclear],

10 JUNE TALKS: MEETING WITH THE DUP AND UK UNIONISTS

Shortly before the talks began, and immediately after his meeting with the UUP, the Prime Minister met Paisley and McCartney. Michael Ancram was there on our side.

Paisley said that there was a point of order he wanted to raise. The Prime Minister said that he was aware of the issue. He thought it right that the participants in the talks should discuss the Chairman's role and the agenda. The Governments could propose but not dispose. He therefore suggested that, when he and the Taoiseach had finished their statements, discussion should move on to these issues. Sir Patrick Mayhew might make this clear at the outset.

Paisley went on to invitations to the talks. The legislation empowered Sir Patrick Mayhew to issue invitations. But he had also received one from the Irish Foreign Minister. This was not acceptable. If the Taoiseach claimed to be the co-sponsor of the talks, he would not wear this. Spring was also claiming that Sir Patrick Mayhew was operating under the authority of Mitchell. The Prime Minister said that the invitations had been issued by HMG. Sir Patrick Mayhew was certainly not reporting to Mitchell, although it was true that the various strands would make reports to plenary.

Paisley repeated that the question of sponsorship of the talks was vital. If the position was not made clear at the beginning, it would be a running sore throughout the talks. He had no objection to the Taoiseach addressing the meeting as leader of the Irish delegation, but he could not do so as co-sponsor. The Prime Minister said that the Irish Government had a legitimate interest in Strands 2 and 3, but not of course in Strand 1. He did not think the Taoiseach would be claiming to co-sponsor the talks.

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McCartney said that it had to be clear that the proposals on the agenda were only proposals. The Prime Minister said that he was not resiling from what had been proposed. But the reality was that nothing was written in stone, and the participants had to be in agreement. The same went for the question of chairmanship. McCartney said that he was worried about what Mitchell might propose. This was not an emotional response but a "cerebral" one. If Mitchell was Chairman, the US would have a role in discussing the future of part of Britain. The nationalists had always wanted to internationalise the problem, and would have achieved this. This could not be helpful. Mitchell was a decent man, but that was not the point.

Paisley commented that if the apostle Paul had been appointed chairman in the same way as Mitchell, he would have opposed him too. The Prime Minister said that he understood these concerns but Mitchell had shown no sign of backing away from what he had proposed in the Mitchell Report. Moreover he was best placed to insist on its implementation, including with Sinn Fein.

Paisley went back to the question of discussion of the agenda and the chairmanships. If Sir Patrick Mayhew's statement was acceptable, he was prepared not to intervene himself. But the question of issuing invitations to the talks had to be absolutely clear. The Irish Government were trying to get their toe in the door, and this had to be resisted.

Comment

Like the meeting with Trimble which immediately preceded it, this was a reasonably good tempered exchange, even though the agreement about not intervening broke down just before the talks began.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever
JH
JOHN HOLMES

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Northern Ireland Office

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