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From the Private Secretary

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Dee Ken,

### MEETING WITH DUP, 24 NOVEMBER

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The Prime Minister spent almost an hour with Dr Paisley, Peter Robinson and Willie McCrae in the House of Commons. Adam Ingram, Jonathan Stephens and I were there on our side.

Paisley began by saying that there was no good news to report. Even protagonists of the talks process were saying it was a sham, so he hardly needed to comment. But he was very concerned at the succession of concessions to the IRA, and particularly the trend towards reducing security in Northern Ireland. This was causing anger and fear in the Protestant community. Business was beginning to say the same. A businessman in his constituency who had been attacked by the IRA had been refused protection. Even Nigel Dodds had only got protection with great difficulty after the attack in the hospital. Meanwhile, it now looked as if known IRA terrorists would get protection. How could this be explained?

The Prime Minister said that he had received more complaints that there was still too much security. There was obviously a continuing danger from the CAC, and he would continue to listen to the security advice he was given. His impression was that security had been reduced less during this ceasefire than last time, and he would like to reduce it more if it were safe to do so. Meanwhile, he was happy for specific issues such as those raised by Dr Paisley to be considered.

Paisley went on to raise the march the previous day in Belfast by 5,000 people, some of them wearing UDA uniforms. No one had even seemed to question this, but the UDA was an illegal paramilitary organisation and the IRA would be next if nothing was done. Adam Ingram said that it was for the police, and then the DPP, to take action in the first place. He assumed that Dr Paisley would not want the Government to try to direct them. Dr Paisley reacted angrily to this. Surely it was obvious that something should be done about the UDA

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flouting the law on a Sunday. McCrae added that it was now an accepted joke in the Protestant community that, while in the old days the Police had taken 7 days to say they did not know who had carried out particular attacks, now it took only 7 hours for the police to say that a particular attack was not sectarian. There had been a second IRA knee-capping a few hours ago, but nothing was being done.

Robinson raised again the offer of security to a Sinn Fein councillor. It seemed incredible that he might be given a gun. He had thought the idea was to take the guns away from the IRA. Adam Ingram explained the process involved.

The Prime Minister tried to turn discussion onto bigger issues. He would like to hear from the DUP where they saw particular difficulties with possible outcomes of the talks, in each of the three strands. Robinson said that they had been told nothing about what was going on in the talks. Paisley said that, unlike Trimble, he was not prepared to discuss the British Constitution on the same basis as Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. Articles 2 and 3 should not be regarded as a bargaining chip. It was outrageous that the 1920 Act, the title deeds for Northern Ireland, was now on the negotiating table. The Prime Minister said that there was nothing to prevent anyone putting the 1920 Act on the table, although he was not aware that Trimble had agreed with this. He repeated his question about the three strands. Paisley and Robinson continued to talk about the 1920 Act and Articles 2 and 3. Paisley quoted Andrews as saying that the best day's work De Valera had ever done was to put Articles 2 and 3 in the Irish Constitution.

The Prime Minister said that we wanted to see Articles 2 and 3 changed, and if this could be done earlier in the process, so much the better. More widely, the question was whether Northern Ireland should stay within the Union or whether there should be a united Ireland. If the answer was that it should stay within the Union, as he assumed and expected, the question then was what needed to accompany this in order to bring the Irish Government and SDLP to accept it, as they seemed ready to do in principle. This led to the further question of whether what should accompany it would be in some way a slippery slope towards a united Ireland. There was no reason why this should be the case, and it was worth giving time and attention to make sure that it was not.

Robinson commented that the Irish Government and the SDLP would only accept a solution within the Union as a transition. Paisley said that the current



process had to be destroyed before the slippery slope to a united Ireland could be avoided. The Joint Framework Document led straight down that slope.

Robinson tried to answer the Prime Minister's questions more realistically. A devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland was acceptable as long as it did not suck the parties into a united Ireland. It could do this, for example, through the duty placed on members of the Assembly to cooperate with North/South arrangements. The Prime Minister commented that North/South cooperation had to be a sensible proposition, as long as the representatives from the Irish Government and the Assembly were separately mandated, and a North/South body could only operate through unanimity. This gave the Assembly an arm-lock on any North/South body. There was plenty of room for argument over the powers such a body should have. But he did not see that the powers themselves created a slippery slope. Robinson disputed this. It all depended on the powers. The Framework Document would put the Unionists into Government on an all-Ireland basis. All they would have was a veto. The Prime Minister asked whether the DUP could nevertheless accept some kind of North/South structure. Paisley said that it would inevitably be or become an all-Ireland Government, and any promises about vetoes now would be abandoned in the future.

The Prime Minister repeated that he did not want a united Ireland and did not believe what was proposed would lead to it. But a settlement was in the interests of the Unionists. Once there was a settlement, time would tend to remove the problems, because most people in the Republic were increasingly uninterested in Northern Ireland. Paisley agreed that people in the Republic did not really want Northern Ireland but, abetted by McCrae, went on to various anecdotes about how Nationalists were brought up to hate the Union, and the Protestants were the community in Northern Ireland which was discriminated against.

Robinson returned to Strand 1. What was under discussion was broadly acceptable as long as it was not part of an all-Ireland structure, with all-Ireland duties placed on members of an Assembly. As far as North/South cooperation was concerned, there could be no relationship with Dublin unless the Irish territorial claim was removed, not just changed to reflect consent. If this happened, issues of mutual benefit could be discussed, and then taken back to the Assembly for action. There should not be an executive body, which would be an embryo for an all-Ireland Government. Paisley interrupted to say that the Prime Minister was clearly not aware of what was in the Joint Framework Document. So he would send him the DUP's analysis to cure his ignorance. The Prime



Minister had said some frightening things. The Joint Framework Document was quite unreasonable and not a basis for a settlement. It had to be scrapped.

Robinson said that the Prime Minister would be badly advised if he met Adams before Christmas, not least following the recent punishment shootings. He also wanted to know whether the triple lock of parties, people and Parliament still applied. The Prime Minister said that he had confirmed this. Robinson asked what would happen if there was no agreement between the parties. I said that the Prime Minister had spelt out the position in the House of Commons in response to the Opposition's questions. Robinson said it was still not clear what would happen if the parties did not agree. The Government had hinted that they could still put proposals to a referendum. The Prime Minister said that our aim was agreement. But it was true that no one could have a veto over the process. In any case, he would rather have the DUP in the process than outside. Robinson said that the DUP would be there if the IRA were not there, and if the process were not based on the Joint Framework Document.

Discussion became even more disjointed at this point. Paisley raised the need to continue the Disability Living Allowance. This was a cross-community issue but very important in Northern Ireland. Many people lived in very difficult circumstances and needed this allowance. He then returned to the issue of Adams seeing the Prime Minister. The Continuity Army Council was getting hold of semtex from the IRA. This was very serious. Seeing Adams again would only help to convince the Republicans that they could do virtually anything without being thrown out of the talks. Robinson said that paramilitary punishments were contrary to the Mitchell principles. Would Sinn Fein be thrown out of the talks? The Prime Minister said that this was a problem with both Loyalists and Republicans. Robinson agreed. The Loyalists should be thrown out too. The Prime Minister said that this would no doubt be looked at.

McCrae raised the possible release of paramilitary prisoners. They should serve their time in prison. This was an issue constantly raised with him by victims of violence, who were the ones who suffered longest. Transfers were one thing, but release would be another. The Prime Minister said that he could imagine the distress of the victims. Adam Ingram said that we had not discussed releases with the parties, although the issue had been raised. Our concerns were more focussed on transfers and, for example, the Irish move to extend the maximum sentences in the Republic. McCrae referred to the recent outcry over the Scottish prisoner. Dr Mowlam had clearly tried to push this through for political reasons. This had devastated people in Northern Ireland



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The Prime Minister said that this had been resolved satisfactorily in the end. More widely, he was simply trying to do the right thing in taking forward the talks process. He believed that it was worth a serious try to achieve a settlement, as long as this did not involve surrendering major principles. The DUP could even be proved right in the end, but he continued to believe the effort was worth making. Paisley said that the Prime Minister could be sincere but still wrong. He knew the people of Northern Ireland and always got the biggest vote. Even if the parties inside the present talks all agreed – which he doubted – the people of Northern Ireland would reject the proposal. The Prime Minister had not thought through the problems and did not know what the Joint Framework Document said. There was also a gap between Dr Mowlam's philosophy and the views of the Unionist community. If there was doubt about whether Northern Ireland should remain part of the Union, why should this not be put to the vote now? What was the Government afraid of?

The Prime Minister said he was not afraid of this, but the point was that Northern Ireland was a divided community. It was surely better to find a basis for a settlement and to move forward with the agreement of the Irish Government and the SDLP. Paisley commented that they would never agree to a settlement unless Sinn Fein also agreed. Robinson repeated that the DUP would like to have been in the talks but could not go back on their election promises. McCrae added that the DUP wanted a settlement, but the fact was that Adams and McGuinness had not renounced violence. The present talks were a farce. Besides the knee-capping, extortion and crime were being continued by the paramilitaries on a daily basis. Paisley echoed this. Drugs were a particular problem. A Drugs Squad Officer had made perfectly clear the deep involvement of the UDA and the UVF in the drugs industry in Northern Ireland. But nothing had been done. Meanwhile, the Loyalist spokesmen for these paramilitaries were hailed as men of vision. But they would never get the votes he did in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister concluded that he was clearly not going to convince the DUP, but he wanted to stay in touch. In particular, he would want to talk through with them the main issues if and when a solution came closer.

### Comment

Not a productive discussion, but the atmosphere was reasonably friendly for the most part, although Paisley came close to anger on



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one or two occasions. Robinson would clearly have liked a more substantive discussion of the issues, but was unable to get past the anecdotal outbursts of his colleagues.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours  
John  
JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq  
Northern Ireland Office