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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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Yes
ms

C Powell Esq
Private Secretary
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Prime Minister
Agree to a meeting
with the three Church leaders
before Christmas? 29th

November 1985

I think this one should be
a meeting rather than a lunch.

CJP 29/11

Dear Charles,

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland have asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the Anglo-Irish Agreement (your letter of 20 November refers). The President of the Methodist Church in Ireland telephoned the NIO last weekend to request a similar meeting.

The Presbyterians and the Methodists together with the Church of Ireland represent about three-quarters of Northern Ireland's unionist community. Between them, they exercise a considerable influence on unionist thinking and, through their public statements, are capable of making a major impact on people's attitudes. So far, they have each adopted a rather different approach to the agreement with the Presbyterian Church, as might have been expected, taking the hardest line. Leading members of the Church of Ireland and the Methodists, although concerned about the agreement, seem prepared to give it a chance.

The Secretary of State sees considerable advantage in a meeting between the Prime Minister and the three protestant church leaders. Such a meeting would demonstrate that, at the highest level, the Government understands the fears of the unionist community and is prepared to listen to their point of view, and would tie in with the thoughts expressed in your letter of 28 November.

Reassurances from her about the unionist position would help to allay these fears and would strengthen the hand of those church leaders who are prepared to wait and see how the agreement works. There can be little doubt that the churches will play a significant part in the development of unionist attitudes in the weeks and months ahead.

If the Prime Minister is prepared to undertake this meeting, perhaps as the first in the proposed series (about which I will write again shortly with further names), I would be happy to contact the people involved and to make the necessary arrangements.

Yours Sincerely

Neil Ward.

Ireland; Anglo-Irish Summit Pt 12

