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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr Kenneth Maginnis MP telephoned me this evening with a proposal to defuse the situation in Northern Ireland. He said that it was a personal idea and that he had not discussed it with his Party leaders. His motive was his strong desire to stop Northern Ireland from slipping into anarchy. Mr Maginnis said that there was increasing pressure among Unionists to accelerate the day of action and make it open-ended. The decision had already been reached to extend it to 24 hours. He had himself been touring his Constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone which was a relatively moderate and sensible area, but he had been very worried by some of the meetings which he had attended. There were clearly harder faced people waiting to take over.

Mr Maginnis said that his proposal involves a small concession by the Government. This was to suspend the operation of the Joint Secretariat established by the Anglo Irish Agreement for a few weeks. He believed that if this could be agreed, he could persuade others in the Unionist movement that the Government had shown a spirit of compromise and that the day of action should either be called off or at least not extended. The suspension would last while talks between Unionists and other parties in the Government took place. He emphasised again that the idea was entirely his own. Time was short. He was ready to fly to London to discuss it with me.

I said that I noted very clearly what Mr Maginnis had said. It was not for me to pronounce on it. I would ensure that his idea was passed on and that he received a prompt reply. I would make only one comment. During their meeting with the Prime Minister, the Unionist Party leaders had at one stage suggested suspension of the activities of the Inter Government

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Conference and of the Joint Secretariat. The Prime Minister had pointed out that the Agreement itself provided for both parties to operate and it was therefore impossible for HMG unilaterally to declare a suspension of their activities. Mr Maginnis said that he recognised this point but that the Unionist supporters had to be offered something if a way out of the present impasse was to be found.

I subsequently telephoned the Northern Ireland Private Secretary to convey the gist of the above. Mr Daniell said that he would try to get Mr King to telephone Mr Maginnis back this evening or tomorrow.

C.D.P.

CHARLES POWELL

1 March 1986

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