

SUBJECT CC MASTER

EL3AYS.



bc PC

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

18 March 1986

**ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND**

The Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Secretary had a brief discussion this morning of the line which Mr. King should take in further meetings with Mr. Molyneaux.

Mr. King said that he would be seeing Mr. Molyneaux again later today. He saw the purpose as being to help responsible Unionists get back to a position where they could accept the Government's offer of talks. The Prime Minister said that the right course was to stand by the agreement reached on 25 February when she had seen Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley. The Government was ready to take up the Unionist leaders' suggestion of round table discussions on devolution, was ready to operate the Anglo-Irish Agreement sensitively meanwhile and recognised that we should need to consider what the outcome of successful round table discussions would mean for the work of the Inter-Governmental Conference. In short Mr. King should make clear that everything which had been on offer on 25 February remained on offer, but no more.

Mr. King said that the Prime Minister would need to reply shortly to the letter which she had received from Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Paisley. There seemed to him to be two alternative approaches. The first would be to reply exactly on the lines just set out by the Prime Minister. The second would be to indicate that if the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland agreed to enter any round table discussions on devolution, so far as the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference was concerned, he would need to make arrangements which ensured that the round table discussions on devolution were given first priority. This would be a broad hint to the effect that the Conference might not meet for a period during which discussions on devolution were taking place. The Prime Minister said that it was essential not to give any indication of weakening in the Government's position. She would therefore wish to reply along the lines of the first of the two alternatives.

I am copying this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

CHARLES POWELL

Jim Daniell, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.