

CAB 4/1610/12

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1971/36

CONCLUSIONS OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD AT 2 15 PM ON
FRIDAY 20 AUGUST 1971 IN STORMONT CASTLE

PRESENT: The Prime Minister
 The Minister of Finance
 The Minister of Health & Social Services
 The Minister of Education
 The Minister of Agriculture
 The Minister of Commerce
 The Minister of Development
 The Minister of Community Relations
 The Leader of the House and Minister of
 State at the Ministry of Development
 The Minister of State at the Ministry of
 Home Affairs
 The Minister of State at the Ministry of
 Finance and Chief Whip

ALSO PRESENT: The Secretary to the Cabinet
 The Principal

1. TALKS AT CHEQUERS ON 19 AUGUST 1971

Reporting on his meeting with Mr Heath at which Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Mr Maudling and Lord Carrington had been present, the Prime Minister summed up the talks as being very satisfactory showing a unanimity in the views of the two Governments on their objectives in dealing with the situation in Northern Ireland. The tone of the meeting was fairly reflected in Mr Heath's reply on Thursday evening to Mr Lynch, a reply which was made in terms clearly identifying Mr Heath with a policy of full support for the Government of Northern Ireland.

Discussion in the Cabinet centered on subjects which had been dealt with during the talks.

(a) SECURITY

United Kingdom Ministers had no doubt that the first priority was an improvement in the security situation and it was hoped that the decision on internment would contribute to this. Once peaceful conditions had been restored to the streets, the Army would concentrate their strength on border security.

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Strong representations would be made by the British Government to the Eire Prime Minister on the need for co-operation between the respective security forces to prevent cross-border attacks and assistance being given from the South to the IRA operating in the North.

The Prime Minister said that consideration was being given to the closing of unapproved cross-border roads, possibly by means of cratering. The Minister of Agriculture considered that this should be done as soon as possible and it might be the more effective if all rubble was removed from the vicinity of the craters.

(b) POLITICAL INITIATIVES

United Kingdom Ministers clearly accepted that in any moves to encourage the minority to play their full part in the affairs of the State the constitutional position of Northern Ireland must remain inviolate. However Opposition MPs could be attracted back to Parliament, any scheme must operate within the framework of a majority rule democracy. Within this principle the Home Secretary thought he should try to have talks with the SDLP Members to persuade them to return to Stormont. It was recognised that such a move would require to be handled carefully to avoid any reflection on the standing and credit of the Northern Ireland Government.

The Prime Minister assured Ministers that he would have the opportunity of considering the proposal in more detail, both as regards the method of bringing the discussions about, and the basis for them.

(c) WHITE PAPER ON LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE

The Prime Minister stated that United Kingdom Ministers had welcomed the timely issue of the White Paper. He agreed with the Minister of Community Relations that it should be distributed as widely as possible in quarters which could influence public opinion and informed the Cabinet that copies had been sent to the National Press and Press Agencies in London, Members of both Houses at Westminster and to COI for British Embassies abroad. Translations were being made for foreign distribution.

(d) CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The Prime Minister said that United Kingdom Ministers were unable to make any helpful suggestions for dealing with this problem specifically.

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The Minister of Development pointed out that the Cabinet Emergency Committee would be meeting on Monday next to consider reports by Departments on ways of combating the campaign and particularly with reference to the operation of the system of enforcement of judgments.

(e) THE ECONOMY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

On the question of stimulating the economy when normality returned in the community, the Prime Minister said that he was assured by the United Kingdom Government that there would be no financial obstacle to reconstruction and investment when the time was appropriate.

(f) ALLEGED ILL-TREATMENT OF DETAINEES

The Prime Minister informed the Cabinet that it would lie with the United Kingdom Government to take such action as they considered fitting if the GOC recommended an investigation. It was likely that any enquiry would be undertaken by a prominent Lawyer and Doctor.

2. AUTUMN DEBATE ON MACRORY REPORT

The Prime Minister said that the questions surrounding the increase in the size of the Commons and alteration in the composition of the Senate were matters for consideration and decision by the Cabinet. An early decision was desirable if radical changes were to be proposed and Whitehall informed so that the suitable way to secure any necessary amendments in legislation might be explored.

Dealing with a proposal by the Minister of Community Relations that the Crowther recommendations on Northern Ireland should be brought forward before the main Report, the Prime Minister said that he adhered to the opinion that an interim Report making a distinction between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom would not be to Northern Ireland's advantage.

3. ROLE OF THE POLICE

The Minister of Agriculture found the continuing conditions under which the Police refrained from action pending intervention by the Army unsatisfactory and asked if their former status could not be restored to the Police. The Prime Minister pointed out that in general there could be no change until the IRA campaign was at an end and that the future role of the Police was under consideration by a Working Party representative of both Governments.

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4. INTERNMENT

The Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs suggested that, in view of the criticism that the application of detention was one-sided, it might be made known that one or two Protestants were among those arrested for suspected IRA activities.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'A. M. S.', written in a cursive style.

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