

R Pa Mr. [unclear]

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NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE HOME SECRETARY AND THE CABINET
AT STORMONT CASTLE ON TUESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 1971 AT 9 15 AM

PRESENT:

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| The Prime Minister | The Home Secretary |
| The Minister in the Senate | |
| The Minister of Finance | |
| The Minister of Health & Social Services | |
| The Minister of Agriculture | |
| The Minister of Commerce | |
| The Minister of Development | |
| The Minister of Community Relations | |
| The 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 | |
| The Minister of State at the Department
of the Prime Minister | |
| The Attorney-General | |

IN ATTENDANCE:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| The Secretary to the Cabinet | The Asst Under Secretary, Home
Office |
| The Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet | The Deputy UK Representative in
Northern Ireland |
| The Principal | |

Welcoming the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister expressed his continuing appreciation of the work of the Army, saying that had it not been for the murders over the previous few days recent big arms finds would have hit the headlines.

Referring to the criticism which had been directed at him for not coming often enough to Northern Ireland and the criticism for the lack of spectacular results when he did come, the Home Secretary made it clear that he regarded his present visit as routine. His assessment of the military position was that the struggle was following a fairly predictable course with improved intelligence (in which internment played its part) making it possible for the Army to increase its pressure and forcing the IRA to switch to new targets; some setbacks were, however, only to be expected.

SECRET

SECRET

On the political front the Home Secretary stressed the absolute necessity for maintaining the bipartisan approach at Westminster and not forcing the Labour Party into a stance dedicated to the unification of Ireland, a stance which they would have to honour should they be returned to power. Reiterating his proposals for the sequence and substance of inter-party talks, the Home Secretary assured the Cabinet that political progress would only be made by agreement. While accepting the need for the maintenance of the bipartisan approach, the Prime Minister thought that a reservation should be made on matters of principle and suggested that references by the Leader of the Opposition to the prospect of a united Ireland had given fresh hope and encouragement to the IRA.

Drawing the Home Secretary's attention to the sanctuary and sources of supply offered by the Republic of Ireland, the Minister of Health and Social Services said that the Army could make little progress against these handicaps and he regretted that the Government of the Republic was showing little signs of dealing with the problem. Developing this theme and claiming that similar attacks against the South Coast of England would not go unchallenged, the Minister of Agriculture raised the question of sanctions and went on to draw attention to some weaknesses in control of the Northern Ireland side of the Border. Referring to recent escapes from Belfast Prison, the Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs complained of the lack of Army activity in the Border area on that occasion and criticised the decision not to demolish certain bridges over streams on the Border as, in his opinion, craters further back could be readily filled in again.

Defending the decision not to involve the Army in any demolition works within 300 yards of the Border, the Home Secretary contended that it would be wrong to deplete the Army in Belfast in order to produce a stronger presence on the Border. Turning to the question of sanctions, the Home Secretary questioned their effectiveness and suggested that to threaten their use might only serve to unite the various political groups in the Republic in their hostility towards the United Kingdom. He thought that some lesser measure such as the introduction of passports for Irish citizens would only be a pin-pricking irritation.

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The Prime Minister said that it was intolerable that murderers, escaped prisoners and IRA leaders could not only give well-publicised press conferences in the Republic but could use public buildings such as the Mansion House in Dublin for this purpose; it was also intolerable that the IRA - although proscribed - could operate openly from registered addresses in Dublin. Expressing his satisfaction at the pressure being put on the Government of the Republic by the Irish Labour Party and hoping that Fine Gael would follow suit, the Home Secretary spoke of his concern about the extradition arrangements. Explaining the difficulties about extradition for so called "political offences", the Attorney-General suggested that the Government of the Republic could enforce its internal laws more rigorously. Pointing out that the subtleties of expression as recorded in the Westminster Hansard were largely lost on the people of Northern Ireland, who were naturally more prone to accept what came to them by television and newspaper, the Minister of State at the Ministry of Finance warned the Home Secretary of the apprehension with which the public viewed the "open-ended" talks on political changes. The Home Secretary quoted from his recent speech at Westminster, emphasising the necessity for agreement but the Prime Minister cautioned against any agreement between the Parties at Westminster which might not be acceptable to Northern Ireland. To this the Home Secretary replied that the initial talks would be confined to the four Ministers primarily involved - the Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Home Secretary - all of whom were well acquainted with the views of the Government and other parties in Northern Ireland.

While not detracting in any way from the achievements of the Army, and while appreciating the need to retain the support of the British public, the Minister in the Senate gave the Home Secretary his views about the general depression of the public in Northern Ireland and their fears of compromise with the enemy, which to him suggested that the time was not appropriate for discussions about political solutions. Rejecting any idea of compromise with the IRA, the Home Secretary stressed that the British public expected to see efforts towards reconciliation

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of the two communities in Northern Ireland and that Army action by itself was not sufficient. Supporting the views of the Minister in the Senate about the attitude of the public in Northern Ireland, the Minister of Development warned of the dangers of despair leading not to capitulation but to violent, irresponsible actions and urged some confrontation between the United Kingdom Government and the Government of the Republic but again the Home Secretary argued that such a course could react in favour of the latter.

The Minister of Development then enquired as to what further could be done internally in Northern Ireland eg by means of a second tier of the UDR or in some local "Eyes and Ears" organisation. The Home Secretary thought that the recruitment of a second tier could detract from the recruitment of the main body of the UDR but at a later stage in the meeting the Prime Minister returned to this point to suggest that older men, perhaps unwilling to join the main body for mobile duties away from home, might be prepared to enrol for static duties in their own localities. The Home Secretary agreed to consult the GOC about this question.

Commenting on the expressions of unease in the Republic about the attitude of the Government there, the Minister of State at the Department of the Prime Minister urged the need for subtle propaganda to stress the immorality of violence and the Home Secretary enquired as to the possibility of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy assisting in this direction. The Minister of State thought they would be very willing to use their influence, particularly in view of the Cardinal's recent forthright condemnation of violence and of those behind it; he counselled, however, an approach to Dr Philbin on this matter rather than the Cardinal.

Voicing his difficulty in not knowing the thinking of Her Majesty's Government about possible political changes, the Attorney-General suggested that it should be practicable to amend the Constitution to further protect the concept of Human Rights. The Home Secretary said that both the Government and the Leader of the Opposition had re-affirmed the guarantee to Northern Ireland contained

SECRET

SECRET

in the 1949 Ireland Act and he would consider it wrong for him to suggest any initiative unacceptable to both communities in Northern Ireland. Taking up this point and stressing that it would be wrong for the majority of the people in Northern Ireland to have to face up to any political solution under duress, the Minister of Development returned to the theme of ways and means of augmenting the manpower of the security forces. He saw little signs of the TAVR being used as had been suggested some time previously and thought that the Home Secretary's explanation of legal difficulties ought to be overcome in a survival situation. A general discussion ensued during which the Home Secretary urged that the best way to serve was in the UDR, while Ministers explained that there were still lingering recriminations about its origins and current criticisms about its organisation, screening and deployment. The Minister of State at the Ministry of Finance cited a particular example of lack of co-operation in the speedy clearance of a number of recruits in the Aughnacloy area.

Speaking of the justifiable fears of the police in border areas who were reluctant to operate outside their stations armed only with revolvers, the Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs urged the issue of automatic weapons.

The Minister of Community Relations assured the Home Secretary that his Ministry was not waiting for an end to violence before pressing on with its Social Needs Programme and paid tribute to Brigadier Kitson for his co-operation.

In a brief reference to internment, the Home Secretary suggested that there were still some improvements to be made in procedures and accommodation.

Summing up, the Prime Minister stressed the need for an early lead from the two Governments in support of the concept of an "eyes and ears" service, urged the case for a localised second-tier component of the UDR to operate in urban as well as rural areas and pressed for the issue of automatic weapons to the police for mobile patrol duty, the tightening up of Border security and for a public re-assurance that the inter-Party talks would only take place within the framework of the 1949 Ireland Act. On the question of his Government's own political

SECRET

SECRET

initiatives, the Prime Minister emphasised that the Green Paper proposals were only part of a much greater scheme of improvements, including the re-structuring of local government, the creation of Area Boards for Health and Education and the establishment of new District Councils in all of which, when they come into effect, the Roman Catholic community would be able to play a full and effective part.

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