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240-1-207/3

LATER STATEMENT BY MR HEATH IN THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION IN WHICH HE
DEFINED THE UNITED KINGDOM GOVERNMENT'S IDEAS

Mr Heath began by saying he admired the spirit of the Northern Ireland people. The GOC and the CGS had explained in detail their views on the military situation. It was clear that a military solution would mean an escalation of force, whereas what was needed, in the view of his Government, was a de-escalation; the latter was needed to swing the Catholic community away from those who were using force and if this could be achieved there would be benefits in the South as well. It had been necessary accordingly to consider political moves.

His Government certainly agreed that the guarantee in the 1949 Act should stand. A periodical referendum, as proposed by the Northern Ireland Government, would be a further guarantee; they were prepared to accept this proposal though they would have views on how it should be applied, for example the whole principle of a referendum was that one was seeking a majority view, that is a majority of those who actually vote. While a referendum was alien to United Kingdom practice, it was quite realised that Northern Ireland with its special problems was perhaps in a different situation and that the use of a referendum could be justified there. This was a matter the detail of which could be discussed later.

It was necessary to consider how the Roman Catholics could be brought back into community life. It was not sufficient just to go on dealing with violence. He realised that Northern Ireland had put forward proposals for enlargement of the House of Commons and a re-structuring of the Senate and that the possibility of PR had been mentioned. He would try to get Westminster acceptance of such of these as were agreed. But his Government had decided that these were not sufficient to give the permanent, active and guaranteed role to the minority. The problem remained of how to bring this about.

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If one was going to escape from violence and also enable the Republic to escape from it too - and there were some indications that the Government there were anxious to do this - further action would be necessary in Northern Ireland. This brought up the question of internment which was clearly a major and unacceptable irritant to the Catholic community and which also affected the United Kingdom adversely in its international relationships. There were obvious risks in phasing it out; it would be important to take the advice of the security authorities on this and then to weigh the disadvantages against the political advantage of deflecting the Catholic community from their passive or active support for the men of violence. The United Kingdom would have to take this responsibility; they had decided they must start unwinding the internment process. The "hard men" would still be lifted and put away but a scale-down of the process was imperative. It was the United Kingdom view that the way to do this would be for Westminster to take over responsibility for law and order.

[This was later defined after lunch as embracing the transfer of criminal law and prosecutions, including the organisation of and appointments to the Courts; public order; prison and penal institutions; police; the creation of all new criminal offences with power to delegate to Northern Ireland on fringe matters like food and drugs. Prosecutions would be taken over by the English Attorney-General and the Northern Ireland Director of Public Prosecutions would serve under him. The control and operation of the special powers would also become a matter of United Kingdom authorities (including internment).]

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Stormont would remain with the double guarantee of the 1949 Act and a referendum. The United Kingdom Government would then seek to move in the direction of talks on how the minority could be given their active, permanent and guaranteed role.

They would propose a Secretary of State with responsibility for Northern Ireland affairs in the same way as there were Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales. Additional Ministers would also be appointed.

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