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NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND THE UNITED LOYALIST COUNCIL AT 11 AM ON TUESDAY 19 DECEMBER IN STORMONT CASTLE

Present:

Secretary of State  
Mr van Straubenzee  
Mr Steele  
Mr McDowall  
Mr Platt  
Mr William Craig, Chairman ULC and Leader of Ulster Vanguard  
Mr Jim Anderson, Chairman, Ulster Defence Association  
Mr Thomas Herron, Vice-Chairman, Ulster Defence Association  
Mr William Hull, Chairman, Loyalist Association of Workers  
Mr William Snoddy, Hon Secretary, Loyalist Association of Workers  
Mr William Bailey, Orange Volunteers  
Mr George Green, "B" Specials Association  
Captain R A Ardill, D/Leader, Ulster Vanguard  
Mr R Henderson, Hon, Treasurer, " "  
Mr S M Morgan, Hon. Secretary " "  
Hon. Secretary, United Loyalist Council

The Secretary of State said that he was grateful to the United Loyalist Council (ULC) for coming to the meeting. He would listen with care to what they had to say and would pass on their views to his Cabinet colleagues. He was in no position at this stage to present the Government's views, although he might wish to seek clarification of certain points.

Mr Craig said that the ULC understood the basis of the meeting. He presented on behalf of the Council the attached memorandum "Victory for Democracy and Justice". He added that the Union had always been regarded as a basis of stability, supporting the way of life in Northern Ireland. Many people now thought - in view of the present economic and political policies followed by the Government - that Northern Ireland would be better off as an independent state. If the Westminster Government did not want Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom, they should say so and give the majority power to maintain the State.

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The Secretary of State said that he accepted the implication in the paper that the Army was too blunt an instrument for the maintenance of law and order. Responsibility for law and order had rested with Stormont, but in 1969 their resources had proved inadequate to cope with the deteriorating situation. The Northern Ireland Government had therefore asked the British Army to move in to assist the civilian power. This had happened before the Hunt Report, the disarming of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the disbandment of the "B" Specials. The use of the Army had necessarily involved the Westminster Parliament in Northern Ireland and in particular in the maintenance of law and order to a much greater degree.

Mr Craig said that it was true that the Northern Ireland Government had asked for help. But this was not because the resources at their disposal for the maintenance of law and order were inadequate; rather they had been inhibited from using them because of Westminster influence. He had resigned because of the decision not to strengthen the RUC in 1968/69 despite the lack of adequate equipment or preparation to deal with the campaign of terrorism which was certain to follow the civil disturbances. It was obvious that the British Government envisaged the re-organisation of the RUC and the disbandment of the "B" Specials. If the Northern Ireland Government had not been inhibited they could have prevented the escalation of violence and have done so with the use of much less force than was now being employed by the security forces. The "B" Specials were not in fact hated by the vast majority of the people of both communities, although certain politicians found advantage in saying that they were. He accepted that the Northern Ireland Government could be criticised for not using the resources at their disposal before seeking assistance. But they had been under heavy pressure from Whitehall.

The Secretary of State said that he fully accepted the need to strengthen the police. But the fact was that apart from those who were determined to destroy the State of Northern Ireland there were whole communities who were not prepared to accept the RUC. There were still areas where the RUC could not go without military protection. No police force could function effectively without the general acceptance of the people. The problem was how to achieve that general acceptance for the RUC and the accompanying reduction in the

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need for Army support. It was true that support for the IRA was waning but there had been no corresponding acceptance of the police. Mr Craig and Mr Snoddy said that the only way to gain acceptance of the RUC was to support the re-establishment of the authority of and respect for the police and the law, even if this meant that tough measures were necessary for a time. Some innocent people might get hurt, but in the long term the number would be smaller than if a policy of appeasement towards Republicans and terrorists were continued. The situation was comparable with that of a class of naughty children who had to be disciplined by a strict teacher. In further discussion on the police, members of the ULC argued that the disbandment of the "B" Specials had contributed to the loss of respect for the police. The Army had established their authority by saturation. The same approach should be adopted with the police: first with Army protection then progressively without escort until acceptance was established. Captain Ardill argued that what was required was the complete rejection of the Hunt Report and the re-establishment of the "B" Specials. The Government should call on the many thousands of law-abiding people who were ready to help and saturate the country with law enforcement personnel. Mr Green said that the private Loyalist Armies which were being built up for protection would no doubt make themselves available to the Government. The services and expertise of his association would also be available to assist the Secretary of State if required, particularly in relation to the essential restructuring of the police authority. The RUC Reserve was not a satisfactory alternative to the "B" Specials because they had no command structure of their own. They were simply attached to the local RUC and as a result they were ineffectual and wasted as a counter-terrorist body. The Secretary of State said that there was no question of appeasement. A firm line was being followed and a high level of Army activity maintained - the volume of complaints which he continually received from the leaders of the minority community was evidence of this. He was in fact following a process of gradual acceptance of the RUC much on the lines suggested, with success in some areas. It was not practicable simply to put back the clock and re-establish the "B" Specials. But he would bear in mind the points made.

In further discussion the following main points were raised:

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- a. Mr Hull said that many people had been disturbed by references by the Secretary of State to the special position of Northern Ireland and to the Irish Dimension. The Secretary of State said that the fact that Northern Ireland was separated from Great Britain by water meant that there were special problems and interests in Northern Ireland that required different treatment. Northern Ireland had in fact benefited considerably from such different treatment. He sympathised with the concern of the ULC about the financial relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain - that was an issue which would have to be considered very carefully. It also had to be recognised that there were implications in the fact that there was a land frontier between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Irish Dimension could not be ignored, but so long as the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wished Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, a Council of Ireland could deal only with economic and social issues which would be of benefit to both sides. Economic and social co-operation after 1920 had been obstructed by Dublin and not by either London or Belfast. The problems of Northern Ireland in relation to the European Economic Community could, he thought, be dealt with in the context of the special interests of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.
- b. Mr Hull said that the people of Northern Ireland had a right to democratic institutions. Stormont should be restored and law and order re-established under local control. Mr Bailey said that it was proper that Unionists should be appointed to important posts. You could not allow people who were committed to the destruction of the State to participate in power. The Secretary of State said that he accepted that the rights of the majority had to be acknowledged. But there were many sincere members of the minority community who genuinely felt, with or without justification, that they had been treated as second-class citizens. They were not all committed to the destruction of the State. One party rule for 50 years was not in the real interests of any country. Unless some way could be found to persuade responsible members of the minority

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community to co-operate, the same problems in Northern Ireland would recur. This was essentially a problem which only the people of Northern Ireland could deal with. Captain Ardill said that he accepted that there were responsible members of the minority community. But their attitude in the past, encouraged by the Roman Catholic church, had been to abstain from affairs of the State. The Secretary of State said that he accepted this, but if responsible members of the minority could now be persuaded to co-operate the fight against the terrorists would be significantly helped.

- c. Mr Herron said that the build-up of extremist Protestant groups had been encouraged by successive decisions of the Westminster Government. It now appeared that the White Paper would precede the plebiscite. This was wrong: the plebiscite should come first on the simple issue of the Border. The Secretary of State said that there had been no such decision. He had made mistakes in the past in saying that the plebiscite would take place in the autumn and in respect of the timing of the local government elections but he had made no commitment on the timing of the White Paper in relation to the plebiscite. There should be no misunderstanding on that point: he was determined not to get himself on that "hook", although he noted the views expressed. He had taken great care to avoid any elaboration of the questions to be asked.
- d. Captain Ardill said that one major weakness of the previous Stormont Parliament had been that 50% of the Unionist members were also Members of the Government. With a larger House, party discipline would be weaker and issues considered more on their merits. They had in mind a Parliament, perhaps unicameral, of 80 to 100 Members. The Secretary of State said that he noted these points. It had to be borne in mind that the determination of new constituency boundaries would take time.
- e. Mr Craig said that the ULC believed that they represented the views of the majority but their credentials had not been established. The Northern Ireland Parliament should be reconvened, elections held and the new constitutional

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arrangements considered in consultation with the Northern Ireland Parliament.

- f. The Secretary of State said that he had not previously heard the argument that Proportional Representation (PR) would produce a weak government. Members of the ULC said that this had been the result in the Republic, in Belgium and in France. In their view, PR would not in any event work in Northern Ireland. It would be defeated by polarisation and Members from the same constituency would deliberately "play off" against each other. But, above all, PR was a departure from the United Kingdom practice and looked like a move towards harmonisation with the Republic. The Secretary of State said that he would not accept that the Government in France, particularly since 1958, had been weak. Northern Ireland was not in any event comparable to other countries. He saw the emotional objections to PR but if it were used it would be to secure the co-operation of the minority and majority communities in Northern Ireland and not as a step towards harmonisation with the Republic.
- g. The ULC said that they would continue to assist the security forces with intelligence information about IRA terrorists.

X | It was agreed that there should be a further meeting in the New Year when the Secretary of State was in a position to give some clearer indication of the lines along which the Government were thinking.

  
T C PLATT  
20 December 1972

Circulation as attached.

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