

E. R.

RBS/11/39



AVENUE  
P013/2

cc. PS/SOS (B&L)  
PS/Ministers (B&L)  
PS/PUS (B&L)  
PS/Mr Bloomfield 2/5  
NI Perm Secs  
Mr Brennan  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Chesterton  
Mr Gilliland  
Mr Merifield  
Mr Ferneyhough  
Miss Elliott  
Mr Elliott  
Mr Pearson

Mr Cleasby

UNIONIST BOYCOTT OF MINISTERS

Thank you for your minute of 21 November about correspondence with Unionist MPs and Assembly Members.

The attached draft circular to NI Departments provides guidances on the handling of Government business in the light of the Unionist boycott. The draft has been agreed with CPL.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that the Secretary of State is content with this circular to issue to NI Departments.

RBS

R B SPENCE  
Central Secretariat  
25 November 1985  
/JH

DRAFT

TO: Northern Ireland Permanent Secretaries

### UNIONIST BOYCOTT OF MINISTERS

1. This circular gives advice to Departments on the handling of Government business in the light of the proclaimed policy of the Official Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party to boycott NIO Ministers and to refuse to give advice on matters referred to them by the Secretary of State.

#### General

2. The boycott should not be allowed to impede Government business. The basic approach should be to continue to seek advice in writing from Members of Parliament, the Assembly, District Councils, public bodies, political parties etc in accordance with the established procedures. Where such advice is sought, a clear timescale for a response must be established. Where no positive response is received within that timescale, action on the business should proceed. Action should not be delayed because of the absence of a response.

#### Correspondence

3. The rules set out in Cent Sec Circular 5/83 (Access to Government) about correspondence with MP's and Assembly Members continue to apply. Where Unionist representatives write to senior HQ officials rather than Ministers with constituencies' and other queries, the response should issue from the appropriate Minister's Office. Letters to a local offices about individual cases which do not raise any issues of policy should continue to be dealt with at official level. Telephone enquiries and meetings with officials on purely constituency matters should continue to be dealt with in accordance with the advice in Circular 5/83.

#### Formal Referral to Assembly

4. There is no change in the arrangements under which the Secretary of State may refer Proposals for Draft Orders in Council and important policy documents to the Assembly for comment. These will continue to be sent from the Secretary of State to the Speaker although it is not yet clear how the Assembly intends to

handle such matters. The terms of the Secretary of State's letter may require some amendment to make it clear that he will press ahead should the Assembly refuse to give its comments, but further advice will be given on this point later.

5. The Secretary of State will continue to respond to Assembly reports and these should be processed as normal. Where exceptionally a report has been forwarded to a Departmental Minister he may, in accordance with the present rules, reply direct to the Assembly. Central Secretariat should be consulted about any Assembly reports which are forwarded to officials.

#### Evidence to Departmental Committees

6. Departments should continue to respond positively to any requests for officials to give evidence to Departmental Committees. Cent Sec Circular 14/82 which contains guidance on contacts between officials and Committees should be strictly adhered to. In particular, officials should be careful to avoid being drawn into any discussion of questions which, because of their politically controversial character are more appropriate to Ministers than officials (para 14 of that Circular). This includes all questions concerning, however indirectly, Anglo-Irish developments and their impact. If pressed on such matters, officials should suggest that questions be addressed or referred to the Secretary of State.

#### Assembly Motions and Adjournment Debates

7. The rules set out in Cent Sec Circular 8/83 should continue to be applied and in particular Departments should continue to take the usual follow-up action on points raised during adjournment debates. For the time being, all replies to motions and adjournment debates should be in writing rather than an offer of discussion with Ministers or officials. Any proposal for an oral response should be referred immediately to Central Secretariat.

#### Draft Orders in Council

8. Northern Ireland MP's will continue to receive copies of Proposals for Draft Orders in Council and any comments received should be considered in the usual way. Northern Ireland MP's should also continue to receive any government responses to Assembly reports on particular Proposals. The Departmental Minister should also give MP's details of any significant changes which have been made to Proposals after the consultation process.

8. Further advice will be issued if circumstances change. Central Secretariat will be glad to advise on any point of difficulty.

R B SPENCE

Central Secretariat

November 1985

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