

CONFIDENTIAL

BRIEF NO 23

CURRENT POLITICAL/SECURITY ISSUES INCLUDING PROTEST ACTION AGAINST ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

1. SECURITY

1.1 There is at present concern in Government and construction circles because of the PIRA bombing campaign against security force bases and in threats to contractors who are undertaking work at these locations. The situation has worsened in recent weeks because the threats have now been extended to firms which provide supplies and services to the bases. There have been murders of directors of construction companies and this obviously lends weight to the threats. An additional complication is that the Loyalist paramilitary groups are now, by way of reprisal, threatening the workers of any firm which employs Catholics in Loyalist areas. Government's obvious concern is to ensure that work is not stopped and consideration is at present being given to how this might be achieved. As well as Northern Ireland officials, the PSA which is responsible for the provision of Army bases in Northern Ireland is represented at the discussions which are taking place. The threats and their effect on the employment situation have been roundly condemned by Ministers, public representatives from all the constitutional political parties, the construction industry and the trade unions.

2. UNIONIST PROTEST ACTION

Leaders of the Unionist parties have embarked on a protest campaign against the Anglo-Irish Agreement which has a number of immediate and relevant implications for DOE.

2.1 PLANNING ISSUES

Under planning legislation, the consent of DOE is needed to display an advertisement. Sixteen out of twenty-six District Councils in Northern Ireland have displayed banners on their premises indicating objections to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, typically the banner at the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

City Hall, Belfast, that "Belfast Says No". These banners are in fact treated as advertisements for the purposes of the Advertisement Regulations and all Councils, with the exception of Cookstown, applied for Advertisement Consent. Consent was granted for a period of 3 weeks as would be the normal practice for Advertisements of a Temporary Nature. The 3 month periods have all expired so that these banners are now unauthorised. Some Councils have applied for an extension of time which was refused - others did not apply. DOE must now decide what action is to be taken with respect to the unauthorised banners. A paper on this issue will shortly be presented to Ministers.

2.2 COLLECTION OF RATES AND MOTOR TAX

DOE is responsible for the collection of all Rates in Northern Ireland, and as an agent for the Department of Transport in Great Britain, for the collection of all vehicle excise duties in Northern Ireland. The leaders of the Unionist Parties have asked rate payers to withhold payments for Rates and a number of Unionist politicians have also indicated that, as part of the protest against the Anglo-Irish Agreement, they are also refusing to tax their motor vehicles. DOE is closely monitoring the implications and effect of these protest actions. It is difficult to be precise at this time as to what the precise effect of the call to withhold payment of Rates since, because District Councils refused to strike District Rates by the due date earlier in 1986 and the Department of the Environment had to exercise those functions, the issue of Rate Demands in 1986 was later than in 1985. During the current financial year, 1986/87, a total of £260m is due in Rates from 614,000 properties. DOE is monitoring both the rate collection and motor tax issues carefully and reporting regularly to Ministers, including recovery and enforcement action.

3. DISTRICT COUNCILS

The policy of Unionist controlled Councils to adjourn business is continuing although both Belfast and North Down Councils have formally voted to resume normal business. Notwithstanding the adjournment policies, essential local services continue to be delivered although it has been

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

necessary for DOE, on 2 occasions to intervene by the use of temporary emergency powers to secure the delivery of certain services. There have already been a number of High Court actions taken by both Sinn Fein and the Alliance Party which are significant in their interpretation of case law for all District Councils and in their relevance for the specific Councils involved, ie, Craigavon, Belfast and Ballymoney. On 8 September, the High Court will meet to fix a date for further Judicial Reviews requested by the Alliance Party into the actions of Lisburn, Antrim, Castlereagh and Coleraine Councils. It is likely that the threat of such Court action, together with recent decisions of North Down Council to resume business will now result in a review of policy by the Unionist Parties and further action in respect of District Councils is to be expected. DOE and NIO monitor District Council affairs closely and make regular reports to Ministers on developments.

CONFIDENTIAL