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30 September, 1970.

1. After careful study through the summer by our Departments (virtually all of which are involved to some extent), the Cabinet here are now getting down to the detailed consideration of the Macrory Report proposals.
2. I do not have to tell you that these are very far-reaching and controversial. Their central theme is the desirability of moving ultimate responsibility for many of the most important services now conducted by local authorities to the Government and Parliament of Northern Ireland. This would represent a profound change and indeed a more radical step than that proposed by Maud for England or Wheatley for Scotland.
3. What we are considering, therefore, is not merely the reform of local government in Northern Ireland but a possible reconstruction of the machinery of government as a whole. We could be involved in far-reaching changes in departmental functions. Moreover, the Macrory Report itself (at paragraphs 91-93) makes the point that changes such as they propose would have profound implications for the work of the Northern Ireland Parliament and might well make desirable an increase in the size of the House of Commons and the development of a new system of select committees. Paragraph 94 of the Report also raises the possibility of some amendment to the constitution of the Senate. Any constitutional changes of a far-reaching character would, of course, involve amendment of the Government of Ireland Act 1920.
4. Ideally one would like to be able to tackle the entire problem - involving both local and central government - as a unity, but here we come up against critical questions of timing. Local government elections, normally due in 1970, have already been postponed until next year. As the Macrory Committee itself observed (at paragraph 11) "with the best will in the world a further postponement may well be unavoidable but any protracted postponement, particularly in the light of the promise of a new

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and wider franchise, would plainly be most undesirable". I do not think we could support a situation where the universal franchise now on the statute book would not, in fact, be called into use until (say) 1974. It is, however, the view of Brian Faulkner and myself that if we were to decide upon and attempt to carry through a wide-ranging reorganisation of the machinery of Parliament and Government as a whole, we would have to face up to this wholly unacceptable degree of delay.

5. What is likely, therefore, is that we will ultimately reach and publish our decisions on local government, simultaneously making it clear that we realise the implications for central government and Parliament to which Macrory pointed and that we are urgently considering within the Government how this aspect should be approached.

6. However, we are of course dealing here with matters not within our constitutional control involving, as they may do, amendment of the 1920 Act. Hitherto it has been the consistent policy of successive Northern Ireland Governments to suggest only the minimum of necessary amendments to that Act. This has been quite frankly because the 1920 Act settlement has been regarded as the rock upon which Northern Ireland has been built and because there have consistently been in the Westminster House of Commons members prepared to use any proposals for major amendment as a platform from which to launch a wide-ranging attack on the entire constitutional position of Northern Ireland. I think our inhibitions on this point have generally coincided with the preference of successive United Kingdom Governments which have not rushed to embrace contentious debates on Northern Ireland and have therefore tended to "save up" various minor amendments for a comprehensive measure every few years.

7. Thus there has been over the past half-century no really fundamental re-appraisal of the 1920 Act. Three new factors have in my view changed the situation. First of all the constitutional arrangements for Northern Ireland are within the terms of reference of the Crowther Commission. I gather that we may expect a report from this source sometime next year, and, while I have no idea

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what they may propose in relation to Northern Ireland, we clearly must rate it at any rate a possibility that this could involve more than marginal amendments of the 1920 Act. Secondly we have as you know overhauled over the last couple of years a great many aspects of our life here in order to tackle the root causes of disorder and it may be that such an overhaul should not exclude a review of the central machinery of Government and Parliament itself. Thirdly, as I have set out in this letter, considerations of this sort are inseparable from any study of the Macrory recommendations and their implications.

8. I therefore have it in mind to set up at once an internal working party to consider whether any fundamental amendment of the 1920 Act provisions should be considered, together with other questions of a constitutional character including the merits or otherwise of a move to some system of proportional representation as a basis for election to Stormont. If, ultimately, Ministers here were to decide to embrace the need for constitutional amendment we would clearly have to make a formal approach to HM Government in the United Kingdom.

9. I realise, of course, that you probably would not wish to contemplate any amendment of this sort until the Crowther Report has been received and considered by you and your colleagues. For our part, however, I do not think we want to be in the position of simply reacting to any proposals by an outside Commission and if and when we reach any provisional conclusions I hope we may feel free to discuss these with you even before the Commission reports.

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