



Prime Minister

*Handwritten scribble*

*Much too long & much N.I. involvement*

*Have cut it down*

*This is the minute which I mentioned to you. The draft statement is v. long & a bit hesitant*

*Handwritten signature and date: 22/10*

PRIME MINISTER:

NORTHERN IRELAND : POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

At the meeting of OD on 17 October (OD(79)10th Meeting), it was agreed that I should make a statement in the House on Thursday 25 October, announcing that we intended to call a Conference of the Northern Ireland political parties by the end of November in pursuance of our commitment to return to the people of Northern Ireland more control over their own affairs.

I attach a draft Statement, which is tailored to take account of two recent political developments.

2. First, Ian Paisley came to see me at his request on Friday morning to discuss security. As you will know, he has in the last month been expressing dissatisfaction with the security scene in Northern Ireland; and his party, with some OUP members in support, is pressing for the implementation of a series of extreme security measures, few of which we should or could adopt: they include a curfew in Catholic areas, search and seize operations (again in Catholic areas), the abolition of remission for terrorist prisoners, the virtual closing of the border, and the threat of economic sanctions against the Republic. The meeting with Paisley turned out, predictably, to be a launching pad for a subsequent public statement by him that, until he could be satisfied about security, he would decline to have any further discussions with the Government on either political or security questions. This statement, although it made little or no impact in the English press, has made headlines in Northern Ireland.

3. Secondly, I asked Jim Molyneaux to see me this morning following the OUP Conference and Paisley's statement, to establish whether or not the Official Unionists were likely to take the same line as

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Paisley. I did not, of course, directly raise the idea of a Conference, but using Paisley's statement as a starting point I was able to draw Molyneaux out on possible ways of proceeding. The general impression he gave was that on security many of his members shared Paisley's attitude, which reflected some strong feelings among Protestants in the Province, but nevertheless they would not stand out of further bi-lateral political talks if we proposed them, though they would much prefer that we simply "implemented" the Manifesto. But on one thing he was clear and adamant: he thinks that to get the parties to sit down together in any forum to consider the next steps in political development would positively impede progress, since they would each retreat to non-negotiable positions and would fail to reach agreement. He sees multilateral talks as leading straight to deadlock and while, under pressure, he might attend it would be with extreme reluctance and misgivings. I think we should take very careful account of his and his party's views on this - you may wish to see him yourself.

4. Meanwhile, however, my statement is drafted in terms which make it clear that while we intend to proceed with discussion of proposals and to do so by a Conference, we shall follow whatever course will best produce results on a reasonable timescale. I believe that the best chance lies in formal bilateral talks initially perhaps leading up to formal multilateral negotiations. Jim Molyneaux would then participate constructively, and I believe Paisley will join in after an interval.

5. I am sending a copy of this to the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor,<sup>the</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Defence Secretary, the Lord President of the Council, the Lord Privy Seal, and the Secretary of State for Trade, and to Sir John Hunt.

*Joseph*

gp HA

22nd October, 1979  
/ Signed on behalf of  
the Secretary of State  
in his absence\_7

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DRAFT STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
AT 15.30 HOURS ON 25 OCTOBER 1979

Mr Speaker, I will, with permission, make a Statement about constitutional developments in Northern Ireland.

1. The Government's first - and overriding - duty in Northern Ireland is, and will be, to defend its people against terrorism, from whatever source it may come. Since I last reported to the House, before the Summer Recess, a number of grievous incidents in Ireland have, on both sides of the border, shown how serious the terrorist threat is. I have taken the first opportunity to re-affirm to the House our determination to defeat terrorism, so that the people of Northern Ireland can enjoy the fundamental right to live at peace under the rule of law.

2. I announced during the Recess, some further measures that we have taken to strengthen our hand against the terrorists and I referred to them in my replies to Questions earlier this afternoon. Following my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister's discussions on security with the Taoiseach, I have recently completed very constructive discussions with Ministers of the Government of the Republic of Ireland to improve across the

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border the effectiveness of our respective Security Forces. An increase of 1,000 in the establishment of the RUC has been approved, and recruiting is taking place. I have appointed a new Joint Staff under Sir Maurice Oldfield to improve co-ordination of all Civil and Military forces engaged in the fight against terrorists. All these measures have been designed to improve considerably the effectiveness of the Security Forces and to help them in their fight against terrorism.

3. I am sure the House would wish to pay tribute to the dedication and bravery of the men and women in the security forces who are engaged on our behalf in the struggle against terrorism; and those in the prison service coping daily with those who do not abide by the normal standards of civilised society.

4. The recent outrages have, understandably, created renewed anxiety among the ordinary people of the Province about their security. Some have taken the law into their own hand. On this the Government's position is quite clear: beating terrorists is a job for the professionals in the security forces working under the rule of law : it is no answer for people - however well-meaning - to take the law into their own hands. The Government unreservedly condemns the re-appearance - fortunately so far on a small scale - of sectarian violence.

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5. The House will also be aware that demands have been made for exceptional measures to be taken in the pursuit of law and order; a number of District Councils debated a common resolution asking for a variety of new measures to be taken against terrorism. Most of these ideas - like extradition, hot pursuit, the closure of cross-border roads - are not new. The Government's view is that a balance has to be struck, a balance between measures that are vigorous and effective and the need to respect the civil liberties and human rights of the law-abiding people who make up the overwhelming majority of the population of the Province. The Government, with the support of the Chief Constable and the GOC, believe that the right balance has been struck - although I shall, of course, keep the security situation under constant review.

6. The continuing terrorist threat - and we should frankly admit it - is an obstacle to the political development which I believe to be essential for the well-being of both communities in the Province. Indeed, it is the aim of the IRA to force the Government into a military response - they want a war. It is my belief that the security problems will not be solved by military or police action alone and that the reconciliation of the two communities in Northern Ireland will be greatly helped by political development. Those parties who say that they are not prepared to embark upon discussions with the Government are falling into the trap that the terrorists have set. Moreover, we do not accept that any one party should be accorded the

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right to exercise a veto on political developments. Progress on security must be matched by political progress.

7. The Government declared in the Queen's Speech that we proposed to "seek an acceptable way of restoring to the people of Northern Ireland more control over their own affairs." Since taking office in May, I have, for this purpose, had wide-ranging discussions in the Province. [ I have had a series of private meetings with each of the leaders of the principal Northern Ireland political Parties. I should like to say especially to the Hon Members for Antrim South (Molyneaux); Antrim North (Paisley); and Belfast West (Fitt), that I am grateful to them for the frankness which they have shown in our separate discussions.]

8. These discussions and meetings have <sup>with interest</sup> ~~helped us to understand the positions of the political parties.~~ I have brought away from them two strong and positive impressions. First, ~~it is generally recognised among the political parties~~ that it would be right to try to move away from the present arrangements for Direct Rule from Westminster ~~this was common to all their manifestos;~~ and secondly, there is, in the Province, a willingness to accept that any restoration of political responsibility requires recognition and respect for the interests of others.

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At the same time, ~~there is no gain saying that~~ there are differences of view among the political parties and ~~that~~ it will not be easy to secure agreement on the form that new constitutional arrangements should take.

9. The House will know that there is at present a wide gap between the elected District Councils and Parliament at Westminster. To begin to fill this democratic vacuum, the Government intends to arrange for the early setting up of a new elected assembly for the whole Province, with substantial responsibilities conferred upon it, and with reasonable and adequate safeguards for all sections of the community.

10. We shall soon be laying before Parliament a Consultative Document which will set out a number of ways in which powers might be exercised by an elected body. These will range from a regional council with limited executive powers at one extreme, to a legislative assembly supporting a regional government at the other, but with what HMG would regard as reasonable and appropriate safeguards for the minority in each case. *Add last 2*

*Under sentence as present in para 12.*

11. The Government's view is that, following the private discussions which I have had separately with the political parties in Northern Ireland, we should now go on to consider

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*It is the Government's intention to hold*

~~together the proposals for an elected body which will be set out in our consultative document. The simplest and most straightforward way of proceeding would be to bring together in a Conference under Government Chairmanship~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ political leadership of the four main parties in Northern Ireland. The purpose of such a Conference would be to ~~reach agreement on~~ <sup>discuss</sup> ~~at least~~ the first steps which might be taken to restore to the people of Northern Ireland greater responsibility for their own affairs. We ~~would like~~ <sup>would</sup> like to convene the Conference by about the end of November, ~~in the hope that we should then make sufficient progress to enable the Government to put proposals before Parliament in the early part of next year, for the election of a new representative body for the Province.~~

I shall shortly be approaching the Party leaders to discuss with them <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ arrangements <sup>for</sup> ~~for~~ a Conference.

12. There are a number of issues which the Government has formed a firm view. First, there can be no return to the system of government under which Northern Ireland was ruled for half a century. Nor can we revive the specific arrangements which were tried and failed in 1974. We must therefore look for a new combination of arrangements which will enable all sections of the community to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations. It will also, I think, be both expected and understood that the Conference will not be concerned with

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~~changes in the constitutional status of the Province within the United Kingdom. There is no question therefore of putting before the Conference issues of that nature. Nor would our~~ <sup>do not</sup> proposals envisage any transfer of responsibility for the maintenance of law and order from the Secretary of State.

13. ~~The Government is, of course, aware of the attitudes already expressed by some political leaders in Northern Ireland in which they appear to turn their backs on any proposals for political discussions. I repeat that by so doing, they are playing the terrorists' game for them.~~

~~Northern Ireland needs political progress. All the political parties in Northern Ireland said, in their election manifesto only six months ago, that they want political progress. This House and the people of the United Kingdom will neither understand nor accept the attitude of those intent upon erecting barriers to any such progress.~~

14. I hope that, in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland, there will be a positive response to the Government's proposals, <sup>Northern Ireland needs political progress.</sup> ~~for multilateral consultations in a Conference.~~ We intend to proceed with these consultations based on the consultative document and will do so through whatever channels are open to us, although as I have indicated, the best channel in the Government's view would be an All-Party Conference leading on to proposals for an elected Council for the Province as a whole.

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15. ~~Mr Speaker, I believe that despite the record of past failures to meet adequately the political needs of Northern Ireland, there is an expectation in the Province itself, in this House, and among our allies and friends abroad, that some progress might now be possible, to break the deadlock of the last five years. The Government believes that it will have the backing of all members of this House in its appeal to the people of all sides of the community in Northern Ireland and to their political representatives to respond positively to the Government's proposal. Our endeavour, Mr Speaker, will be to proceed by agreement with all sections of the community. This may mean modest rather than dramatic progress. It will certainly call for a great effort, great patience and mutual trust and that I believe is what we owe the people of Northern Ireland and no less than they are entitled to expect of us.~~

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