



Ireland

SCOTTISH OFFICE  
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*Prime Minister*

CONFIDENTIAL

*Phms 7/6*

Prime Minister

NORTHERN IRELAND: PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

The Home Secretary sent me a copy of his minute of 28 May reporting on the discussion in MISC 24 on 22 May.

I have no comments on the timing of publication. There will no doubt be some attempt in Scotland to contrast the comprehensive discussion of fundamental issues in the consultative document with the very limited proposals on which agreement has been reached in the inter-party talks on improving the arrangements for the conduct of Commons business affecting Scotland. But I do not see the timing of the publication of the report of the inter-party talks as having much relevance to the issue you are to consider in OD.

Obviously, if the consultative document appears in anything like its present form - suggesting the creation of an Assembly directly elected by proportional representation, an Executive responsible to the Assembly and legislative powers over a wide field - it will attract attention in Scotland. In my view, however, the great mass of Scottish opinion is not interested in a Scottish Assembly at the present time, or at most regards the issue as a very minor one in comparison with employment, rate levels, education, etc, etc. Moreover, I believe that there is wide acceptance in Scotland of the view that "Northern Ireland is different".

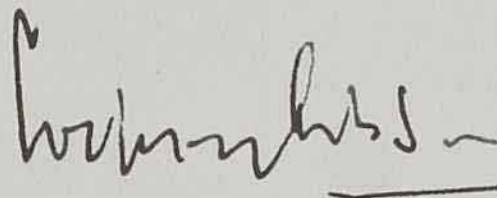
I should add, however, that I find the paradox to which the Home Secretary refers rather misleading. The Scottish Nationalists are, at least for the moment, completely committed to total independence; and arrangements confined to the devolving of executive tasks would have no attraction for them at all. The Labour and Liberal Parties in Scotland might, however, seek to point up the contrast between our attitude to a Scottish Assembly - that the issue is for the moment dead - and what we have in mind for Northern Ireland. I believe, however, that the Labour Party in Scotland is less than wholehearted in its declared commitment to a Scottish Assembly and is well aware that such a commitment is highly unlikely to be accepted by the Party as a whole.

There are one or two points in the draft consultative paper which I think could be amended without weakening its force but which would remove some potential hostages to fortune in Scotland. I am sending a note of these separately to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.



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Copies of this minute are being sent to the members of MISC 24, to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and to Sir Robert Armstrong.



(Approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence.)

9 June 1980



GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND: PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION  
COMMENTS ON PASSAGES HAVING RELEVANCE TO SCOTTISH CONDITIONS

Paragraph 3.5

It has to be recognised that the characteristics of Northern Ireland listed in the second sentence are, with the exception of high energy costs and below-average incomes, also true of Scotland. But the point has to be made about Northern Ireland, and it would not be desirable to try to distinguish the circumstances there from the circumstances in Scotland.

Paragraph 3.6

The statement that:

"Northern Ireland's pattern of needs is not in all respects the same as Great Britain's and it is right that locally elected representatives should have the responsibility - as they do not now - for determining and meeting those needs."

is likely to attract attention in Scotland because the statement is equally applicable there. The point is made, though less directly, elsewhere in the draft; and it is for consideration whether this passage could be deleted without doing damage to the draft. From the point of view of the Scottish Office it would certainly be desirable to drop it.

Paragraph 3.8

Again, Scotland "has characteristics different from those from the rest of the UK, ..... a long tradition of separate institutions of government". It would certainly be preferable from the Scottish Office point of view if the sentence simply said that there is overwhelming evidence that direct rule is not a permanent answer and cannot bring lasting stability. But if it is thought necessary to stress physical separateness and different characteristics, it is still for consideration whether the statement that Northern Ireland "never in its history /has/ been administered as an integral part of the UK" is strictly accurate.

Paragraph 4.6

It is for consideration (the point also arises on paragraph 4.8) whether it is desirable to refer to Scotland at all. From the point of view of the Scottish Office the significant statement in this paragraph is that there is a general wish in Northern Ireland for a transfer of powers. So far as can be judged from the results of last year's referendum, there is no such general wish in Scotland. The meaning of the last three lines of the paragraph is far from clear. If these lines are intended to disarm criticism in Scotland, they are unlikely to serve such a purpose: indeed they seem likely to stimulate argument there. On balance it would be preferable to delete this sentence.



Paragraph 4.8

The fifth sentence might be better rendered as:

"Unlike any other part of the United Kingdom - even Scotland - there is a virtually separate corpus of statute law for Northern Ireland".

Paragraph 4.8A

It is arguable whether the legislative process affecting Scottish legislation is in fact largely entrusted to MPs representing Scotland. The reference in this paragraph is likely to draw attention to the fact that in Scotland, irrespective of the balance of parties there, the Party holding the majority in the House of Commons determines the programme of Scottish legislation. With a directly elected assembly, the position will be different in Northern Ireland. It would be preferable to delete the sentence beginning:

"Because of the small number .....

and add to the previous sentence the words:

"and the small number of NI Members of Parliament".

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