

POWELL, R.P.
N. IRELAND

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD AT THE HOUSE
OF COMMONS AT 4.45 P.M. ON THURSDAY
1ST MAY, 1980

PRESENT: The Prime Minister
The Right Honourable J. Enoch Powell,
M.B.E., M.P.
Ian Gow

1. Mr. Powell started by saying that he believed that the Government might be under two serious misapprehensions about the position in Northern Ireland:-

(a) "That it is essential to do something about constitutional change in Northern Ireland now."

Mr. Powell said that if we were to do nothing, but simply to continue with Direct Rule, there would be no outcry in Ulster. To continue, as we are, would not be unwelcome to the great majority of the people of Ulster, and would be something that would be wholly manageable. Furthermore, the continuation of Direct Rule, in its present form, would be the worst possible message for the I.R.A.

(b) "That you can have an Assembly, with or without an Executive, without fearful trouble".

(i) If there was to be an Assembly, without an Executive, that Assembly would act irresponsibly, because it would have no responsibility. It would discuss any and all matters. It would be hostile and critical. Its criticism would be destructive. It would diminish the role of Ulster MPs at Westminster.

(ii) An Assembly with an Executive, could only be achieved as a result of power-sharing. Thus, the power of the majority would be negated. Any Unionists who were to participate, would have their heads cut off, as happened in the case of Faulkner. The I.R.A. would see a power-sharing Executive as a step in the in direction/which they would like to go. The I.R.A. would be encouraged. They would argue that if they were to persevere, they would be able to force further Constitutional change.

2. Mr. Powell said that since the end of the Constitutional Conference, hardly a day had passed without the media being fed with reports of what the Government was about to do. Mr. Powell handed to the Prime Minister cuttings from The Times for 29th

April and for 1st May. Mr. Powell said that there was no doubt that the briefing which lay behind these two reports (attached) had come from the Northern Ireland Office. Mr. Powell asked that instructions should be given to the Northern Ireland Office to stop briefing of this kind. He said that these reports "cost lives".

3. The meeting ended at 4.55 p.m.

2nd May, 1980

Ian Gow

THE TIMES TUESDAY APRIL 29 1980

Ministers to study plans for Ulster devolution

From Christopher Thomas
Belfast

A number of firm proposals for the devolution of power to Northern Ireland will be studied this week by the unofficial "Whitelaw group" of five Cabinet ministers.

The meeting has been arranged to examine the result of several weeks of intensive work by officials of the Northern Ireland Office in London on a narrow range of options for restoring government to Ulster.

There remains a firm expectation that a White Paper will be published in June, followed by a parliamentary debate. The timing of the imminent talks between Mrs Margaret Thatcher and Mr Charles Haughey, the Irish Prime Minister, is therefore significant.

They are to meet formally in London in the next few weeks. That was agreed during a 10-minute encounter between the two leaders in Luxembourg on Sunday. In line with an increasing tendency towards secrecy, official Dublin sources are under strict instructions not to answer journalists' questions about the meeting.

Mr Haughey is bound to emphasize to Mrs Thatcher that the Irish Republic should be involved in the dialogue on Ulster's political future; he made that point over lunch in Dublin recently with Mr Humphrey Atkins, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

OF COMMONS
ON SWIA OAA

THURSDAY MAY 1 1980

Devolution schemes are studied

From Christopher Thomas
Belfast

The advance towards devolution of power to Northern Ireland continued yesterday as senior Cabinet ministers studied the results of several weeks' work by civil servants.

The unofficial group of five ministers known as the Whitelaw group appraised several outline models for a restoration of government to Ulster. Even the most senior local politicians, however, are not being taken into the Government's confidence.

As a result there is intensive speculation in Ulster on the possible shape of the forthcoming proposals. There are widespread rumours, most of them contradicting each other, about what is likely to emerge in the coming month or two.

The only common ground appears to be that the Government is intent on handing back a substantial measure of power to an elected assembly.