

PRIME MINISTER

*K. P. ... 28/3*

ULSTER

1. Herewith Memorandum which has been sent to me by Peter Utley, with whom I lunched a fortnight ago.
2. You will remember that in our Manifesto, we said this:-

"In the absence of devolved Government, we will seek to establish one or more elected regional councils with a wide range of powers over local services".
3. Earlier this month, Jim Molyneaux told me that when he agreed to deliver the Official Unionist Members of Parliament on our side in the crucial vote at 10.00 p.m. on Wednesday 28th March 1979, it was on the understanding that if our Party was elected in the General Election which followed, we would set up one or more elected regional councils. If Airey had not given a clear indication that this would be our policy, there is some doubt (to put it at its lowest) whether Jim Molyneaux could have delivered the Ulster Unionist votes.
4. Hence Jim Molyneaux's recent Statement in the House that the Official Unionists would give to the Government whatever help lay in their power in order to implement the Government's policy as set out in its own Manifesto.
5. Airey told me nothing of any undertaking to Molyneaux which had been given on 27th/28th March 1979 - and of course Airey was murdered two days later. Nevertheless, it is, of course, correct to say that the policy on which you and Airey had agreed for Ulster had the broad assent of the Official Unionists.

6. Airey believed that Direct Rule would have to continue for some time; I am in broad sympathy with the views which are expressed by Peter Utley in the attached Memorandum; I do not know enough about the current military/R.U.C. thinking to express a view about Utley's suggestion that detention without trial should be re-introduced.

7. Finally, I attach the really splendid article about Airey which Peter Utley has written in today's Telegraph.

27th November, 1979

Ian Gow

## THOUGHTS ON ULSTER

My main anxiety is quite simply that I think the present object of our political strategy in Ulster is disastrously wrong. That object appears to be the restoration of some sort of devolved Parliament with substantial powers and the inclusion in the arrangement of some system of safeguards for the Catholic minority.

Suppose for a moment that this object is attainable. Its attainment would I maintain produce continuing long term disaster.

Devolved government, it is true, produced fifty years of relative peace, but the special conditions on which that peace depended were the following: the dominance in Ulster of a strong, coherent and relatively humane Unionist party which had no wish at all for self government in any field except internal security and which worked hand in glove with British Conservative governments and even with Attlee's Labour administration in 1945. All these conditions have irretrievably vanished. A devolved Parliament in Ulster in the years that lie ahead is likely to be dominated by hard line Protestants far more nervous and bitter than Craigavon and Brookeborough, feeling no special link with any British party and determined to rule the Province itself. The effectiveness of safeguards for the minority in those circumstances will depend on continual British interventions in Ulster politics which will be hotly resented. We seek devolution because we think that it will commit us less than integration; in this we are guilty of a supreme folly.

Indeed, the likely consequence of devolution is independence brought about in the most squalid and discreditable manner. There is an arguable case for independence obviously from Britain's point of view and even from Ulster's, but if that delicate operation is to be attempted it must be attempted deliberately and openly. I hope this will never be the case. I am, however, bound to say, that it is easier to imagine a stable relationship between Britain and Ulster arising from independence than it is to imagine such a relationship arising from devolved government.

I believe that if we are serious in our intention to keep the union, the only way to do it is by what has come to be called full integration. It is not administratively impossible to restore a measure of local government to Ulster and otherwise perpetuate direct rule. There is overwhelming evidence that this settlement would command the acquiescence of far more people in both communities than any other. That truth is obscured by the traditional resistance of Catholic politicians in the North. If, however, full integration were accompanied by regular Border polls, the great bulk of Catholic <sup>OPINION</sup> ~~feeling~~ would be RELATIVELY satisfied. This certainly appeared to be the conclusion which Airey Neave had reached (not perhaps without some regard to the importance of appealing to Official Unionists in the last Parliament) and which was embodied in our Manifesto. I believe that Humphrey Atkins has made a serious mistake in retreating from it.

Of course, the probability is that the present initiative will fail. Even so it will leave a deposit of damage behind it. If it is allowed to drag on for several months (which seems to be the present intention) it will regenerate intense friction between Protestant and Catholic politicians, confirm Paisley in a defiant and destructive role (the only one he knows how to play in spite of occasional superficial gestures of reasonableness aptly designed to exploit the credulity of British politicians and civil servants) and confirm also the growing support for Paisley among Protestant para-militaries. The IRA will profit immensely from all this and will intensify its campaign as soon as the Conference begins to generate animosity. The destabilising effect of this initiative will be immense; any improvement it may produce of our reputation in Dublin or the USA will be short lived and of little material value.

The damage, however, could now be limited. This could be done by abandoning the present plan to allow the Conference to continue for weeks and even months and instead putting a firm time limit on it. It would also help if the Secretary of State were to say now that if agreement commanding wide spread support is not reached on devolved government, HMG will have no alternative but to extend and improve direct rule adding local government institutions to it. I would earnestly plead for the consideration of both these possibilities.

Clearly, I cannot offer competent advice about the details of security policy. However, I would like to make one general point: I cannot think of any terrorist campaign in any part of the world which has been successfully defeated without recourse to executive detention. I do not believe that this has been tried and failed in Ulster. When executive detention was originally re-introduced there, the operation, as we all know, was both belated and mismanaged. Nevertheless it stemmed the rate at which violence was growing and no sooner had its beneficent effects begun to appear than we began to wield the weapon in the most uncertain manner, starting to release people or offer the prospect of release in return for political concessions from the S.D.L.P.. The argument now is that if executive detention were revived, a dangerous furore <sup>WOULD ARISE</sup> from the Catholic population, from the Dublin government and from the U.S.A.. The first two factors are considerably exaggerated: the Catholic population is worn out, and the Dublin government (as must now surely be clear) will give us no more and no less than it is already giving whatever we do. The point I wish to draw attention to, however, is this: the arguments deployed against detention are precisely those which have been, are being and will be deployed against the use of any effective anti IRA weapon. We were bullied into abandoning detention and into substituting for it dependence on interrogation; we have been bullied into blunting interrogation to the point of virtual uselessness and into substituting for it a new dependence on "under cover activities". Under cover activities will shortly come under the same criticism and are capable of being attacked much more effectively than either detention or interrogation. In any case, ~~to~~ ~~delay them~~ it would seem that under cover activities, short

of ad hoc assassinations, may not be effective: they yield intelligence but do they yield evidence? It is lack of evidence which creates the problem. ~~In any case~~, I have no doubt <sup>EITHER</sup> that under cover activities will begin to be modified as soon as the IRA draws the attention of liberal opinion to their existence.

What finally worries me are the methods by which policy towards Northern Ireland is formulated and the style of its presentation. The isolation of the Northern Ireland office from contact with opinion in the Province is notorious and perhaps inevitable. Over the years, however, that office to a greater extent even than other government departments has developed a pattern of thought and a series of automatic reactions of its own. Evidence for this is abundant. It is, for example, astonishing to me how often British politicians and civil servants engage in conversations with Northern Irish politicians without either making themselves understood or understanding what is said to them. Unless the Northern Ireland office is very adept at deception, it would seem that it is vastly surprised, for instance, at the lack of warmth of the reception given to the latest initiative. I, who talk regularly to Northern Irish politicians, was not in the least surprised. I repeat that all this may to some extent be inevitable, but if so the Northern Ireland office is in greater need of outside political advice than it acknowledges. I am surprised, for example, that it does not more often call on the shrewd and well informed opinion of Alistair Cooke of the C.R.D..

But the style in which policy is presented leaves even more to be desired. Imagine how irritating it is, if you have been bombed for ten years during which an essentially unchanging political crisis has been in progress, to be told that the new Secretary of State is acquainting himself from scratch with the nature of the problem to which he brings the advantages of a mind largely free from former contact with it. One of the great differences between the Irish and the English is that the Irish respond to eloquence while the English prefer understatement. It is hard to find eloquent English politicians to reach the hearts of Irishmen, but has the requirement been sufficiently recognised? The accents of policy are very important. As an illustration of what I mean, for example, I think one of the few British politicians (apart from Enoch) who might have gone over better in Ulster than Roy Mason (whose bluntness and lack of sophistication was a fair substitute for eloquence) was Teddy Taylor.

While these words were being written, the S.D.L.P., I understand, was deciding not to go to the proposed conference. If this is so, the initiative is presumably still-born. A dangerous period of disillusionment will now follow. I believe it can be ended only by a firm return to our Manifesto policy, but I am bound to add that I do not believe that this will carry credibility without some change in the personalities involved.

T.E.U.

*November 1979*

