

CONFIDENTIAL

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

OD(79)12
5 July 1979

COPY NO 42

CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

NORTHERN IRELAND : THE OVERALL SITUATION

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

1. Our policy in Northern Ireland can best be considered under three headings: politics, law and order, and social and economic affairs. Each is inseparably connected with the other two, like the three strands of a rope. Each interacts on the other. If all three pull together the rope is strong; if one strand is weaker than the others or subjected to greater strain, the rope could part.
2. I make proposals in OD(79) 13, 14 and 15 for our approach to the policy issues in each of these areas.
3. The attached note pulls together, as background to the Committee's decision, the relevant facts and my impressions on all aspects of the Northern Ireland situation.

HA

Northern Ireland Office

5 July 1979

CONFIDENTIAL

NORTHERN IRELAND - SOME FACTS AND IMPRESSIONS

Social and Economic

1. Nearly two thirds of the 1½ million people of the Province live within 30 miles of Belfast. Outside Belfast (population 360,000) and Londonderry (50,000) there are few villages on the English pattern: people live in small towns and a pepper-pot scattering of rural homesteads.
2. Agriculture is the most important single industry (10% of the working population of ½ million). Farms (average size 75 acres) are less than half the average size in the UK and almost wholly owner-occupied. About half the farmers are part-time. There is plenty of water and plenty of grass for cattle grazing. But the pattern of the land and the fields is not suitable for large scale arable production.
3. There is nothing else going for the Province in terms of natural resources: no indigenous energy (oil, coal or natural gas); no ready access to markets; and many disincentives to industrial investment.
4. 28% (140,000) of the work force is in manufacturing, uncomfortably concentrated in such declining industries as textiles and shipbuilding. Since 1974, 30,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost. Despite Government assisted industrial development, employment is moving away from agriculture (a fall of 10.8% from 1974 to 1978) and manufacturing (a 16.3% fall) and towards private and public services (a rise of 14.9%). Public expenditure per head (£1210 in 1977/78) is nearly 50% higher than in England (£810). Public sector employment is 40% of the total, compared with 30% in Great Britain.
5. Unemployment at over 11% is double the national rate and the highest of any UK region. It did not fall last year as it did in Great Britain. Male unemployment ranges from over 10% in Belfast to over 31% in Strabane - with worse pockets even than this within Employment Areas. All this in spite of an expensive job support programme, with 57,000 jobs receiving support under the job maintenance scheme and Industrial Development legislation.
6. Because of low income and a high birthrate (Protestant as well as Catholic) many more households in Northern Ireland have a lower standard of living as in Great Britain. Weekly household income averaged £79 compared with £93 in the UK. Four times as many people take up Family Income Supplement than in the UK as a whole. The rate of infant mortality is higher. Housing conditions are worse. 20% of dwellings in use are statutorily unfit compared with 7.3% in England and Wales. Hospital services and roads are probably better, and education and recreation as good as in Great Britain. The crime rate, both overall and for juveniles, is significantly lower than in England and Wales, notwithstanding terrorism.

7. Belfast is a particular headache, with concentrations of deprivation and social need greater than anywhere else in the UK. In a group of predominantly Catholic wards in the Belfast urban area 60% of adult males are unemployed and over two thirds of the households lack basic amenities. This is partly the typical inner-city pattern of old housing, with high proportions of the elderly, the unskilled, the unemployed and the unemployable living in a densely populated area; and it is partly a symptom of the ghetto containing highly immobile concentrations of unskilled members of the Catholic minority.

Domestic Politics

8. The most pervasive political fact about the people of Northern Ireland is that 1 million are Protestants and $\frac{1}{2}$ million are Catholics. Not one of these voted in 1979 either for us or for the British Labour Party. The two distinct communities are divided by religion, race, allegiance and politics. Work, friendship and some recreational activities may span the divide. But housing, education, ways of life, culture, and attitudes to history do not. People know to which community they belong and they live, and vote, accordingly. The proportion of votes cast for the orange and green sides hardly fluctuates from election to election. The Catholic minority feels threatened by the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the UK; the Protestant majority feels threatened by the Catholic majority in Ireland as a whole. Violence is a time-honoured reaction by either side immediately the threat from the other looms large.

9. Direct Rule is nobody's first choice of government. It lacks the red blood of politics; under it political life has few outlets and politicians lack responsibility. It is not seen to be democratic. It gives both sides - and their friends in the United States for example - a licence to criticise the British Government. But it gives guarantees to both communities: to the Protestants that they are part of the United Kingdom and to the Catholics that they are being freed from discrimination. It is impartial, sensitive and, to an extent, positive government. It brings together into an indivisible whole the inter-acting strains of economic and social affairs, politics and security.

Law and Order

10. Terrorism does not blanket the Province. Most of the Province is almost permanently free of it.

11. The pattern of deaths and injuries from terrorism has changed since 1973:-

<u>Deaths (Injuries in brackets)</u>	<u>1st half of 1973</u>	<u>1st half of 1976</u>	<u>1st half of 1979</u>
RUC and RUC Reserve	7(61)	15(172)	10(81)
Army and UDR	48(334)	13(99)	16(56)
Civilians	105(1029)	147(1253)	18(225)
	<u>160(1424)</u>	<u>175(1524)</u>	<u>44(362)</u>
<u>Shooting attacks</u>	3321	890	360
<u>Bombing attacks</u>	778	634	332

Note the big drop in civilian deaths and injuries since 1973 and reduction in shooting and bombing attacks.

12. Over the same period the size of the RUC and the RUC Reserve has grown from 6,900 to 11,000 while the peak strength of the Army has fallen from over 17,000 to just under 13,000. There are some 7,500 in the Ulster Defence Regiment.

13. The Provisional IRA aim in the long term to force the British out of Ireland and create a 32 county Socialist Republic; and more immediately to force us into a declaration of intent to withdraw and an amnesty for terrorist prisoners. In the early 1970s the Provisionals were welcomed into the Catholic ghettos to help protect the community against the Protestants. But now the Catholics have become sickened by their brutal methods and apparently pointless and unattainable aims. So they do not now operate from a broad and secure base with large bodies of men.

14. The major responsibility for action against terrorists rests with the police. Thoroughly demoralised and inadequate in the early 1970s, the Royal Ulster Constabulary has been steadily built up in strength, experience, confidence and acceptance. They now police the greater part of the Province including most of Belfast, with the support, if they need it, of the Ulster Defence Regiment. The regular Army still play a major part in supporting the RUC in about a third of Belfast and in other sensitive areas notably along the border. 876 people were convicted of terrorist offences in the first half of 1979.

15. The H-block protest remains a thorn in our side. Prisoners on the "blanket" and taking part in the "dirty" protest are the instruments of a PIRA-inspired propaganda campaign which has its greatest impact in the United States. There can be no question of giving them what they seek: special category status for prisoners convicted of crimes by the due processes of the law. Special category status of any kind would confirm the terrorists as idealists, would raise expectations of an amnesty in due course and would be a further encouragement to violence.

Britain

16. Not surprisingly in view of the scale of its problems, Northern Ireland strikes the newcomer as turned in on itself. Though the people are well used to visiting experts and pundits, they show a relative indifference to how they are regarded elsewhere, except for a resentment of the apparent indifference in Great Britain as tragedy is piled on tragedy.