

SECRET

*Inland 13.*

*for Hunt (1)*

*Prime Minister*

Ref. A0487

PRIME MINISTER

*This is, obviously, a huge improvement. If you agree the text, I will circulate it to members of the other members of OS as a text which you & the Secretary of State have approved.*

Statement on Northern Ireland

Following my talk with you after E this morning I got in touch with Mr. Stowe, and an entirely new, and much shorter, draft has been prepared and agreed between Mr. Stowe and me. A copy of this is attached. Mr. Stowe has now shown it to his Secretary of State who is well content with it.

There are two additional points which you will wish to note:

- (a) The only reference to security in the draft statement is now that in paragraph 13: but this is on the understanding that the Secretary of State will give a substantive reply on the security aspects in reply to a number of Questions which he will be answering before he makes his statement.
- (b) The Secretary of State is bound to get some difficult supplementaries following his statement: and the Northern Ireland Office will be sending you a draft of the proposed replies direct.

*Thank you - that is much better*

*John*

JOHN HUNT

23rd October, 1979

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

1. Mr. Speaker, I will, with permission, make a Statement about the Government of Northern Ireland.
2. The Government declared in The Queen's Speech that we propose "to seek an acceptable way of restoring to the people of Northern Ireland more control over their own affairs".
3. Since taking office in May, I have, for this purpose, had wide-ranging discussions in the Province, and a series of private meetings with each of the leaders of the Northern Ireland political parties represented in this House.
4. My discussions and meetings have confirmed the Government's view that it is right to transfer back to the people of Northern Ireland responsibility, to be exercised by locally elected representatives, for some at least of the powers of government presently exercised by Direct Rule from Westminster.
5. The political parties in Northern Ireland themselves, in their manifestos, asked for this, and there is widespread support for it in the Province.
6. There is, moreover, awareness that such a restoration of political responsibility can only be brought about in Northern Ireland by all parts of the community recognising and respecting the interests of others.
7. It will in due course be for this House to decide, on proposals put to it by Her Majesty's Government, what kind of powers and responsibilities are to be transferred to elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland and through what kind of institutions they are to be exercised.
8. The Government wishes, however, to put forward proposals which, so far as possible, have the agreement of the people of Northern Ireland.

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9. We intend therefore to convene a Conference of the principal political parties in Northern Ireland to seek the highest level of agreement that we can on proposals for a transfer of responsibility which the Government might put before this House in due course.
10. We are, for this purpose, preparing a Consultative Document, which will be laid before Parliament, to serve as the basis of the Conference.
11. The Document will set out a range of powers and responsibilities which the Government for its part would be prepared to see transferred from the Westminster Government.
12. The Document will set out as options for consideration by the Conference a number of ways in which the transferred powers might be exercised; in each case with what Her Majesty's Government would regard as reasonable and appropriate safeguards for the minority.
13. Responsibility for law and order in the Province - which, as I indicated in my statement earlier today - remains the Government's overriding priority in Northern Ireland, would not be transferred.
14. I shall shortly be approaching the party leaders concerned to discuss with them the arrangements for a Conference to be convened as soon as possible and, I would hope, by the end of November.
15. Our aim will be to secure from the Conference, drawing on the proposals in the Consultative Document, workable and acceptable arrangements for giving the people of Northern Ireland greater responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs which we can then recommend to this House in fulfilment of our commitment in The Queen's Speech.