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copy to Mr Gove.

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

17 July 1981

Prime Minister

Would you like to discuss
this with Mr Atkins?

Dear Margaret,

My fear is
that some people
may wish to pull out.
We shall have to
arrange the
speeches carefully
and the motion
not

PARTY CONFERENCE 1981

I have been giving some thought to the desirability of seeking a debate on Northern Ireland during the Conference this year. There seem to be several reasons in favour of it, including these two important ones:

1. The affairs of Northern Ireland have been much in people's minds these last months, but our Party has not debated them in the Conference since 1976. There will certainly be a substantial debate in the Labour Conference the week before and, while the bi-partisan approach may survive to some extent, there will inevitably be loud calls for it to be broken, for the troops to be brought out, for the United Nations to be brought in and similar lunacies. If we do not even mention Northern Ireland the following week, it will be noticed and, I fear, commented upon unfavourably.

2. As we thought, our new political approach (the establishment of a Northern Ireland Council) has not been received with much enthusiasm by Northern Ireland politicians, and it is important to get as much backing for it in Great Britain as possible. No doubt we can get the support of Parliament later in the year, but it would help to persuade the Northern Ireland politicians to be constructive if we could get the backing of our Party Conference too.

← There are of course disadvantages in having a debate, the greatest of which, I suppose, is the danger of having some rather wild speeches.

However, in my judgement, the balance comes down in favour of having a debate if this can be arranged. I should tell you that all the Northern Ireland Ministers agree with this view, so does John Biggs-Davison (the chairman of our back-bench committee) and so also does Edward du Cann, who raised the matter with me a few days ago.

I have talked to Peter Thorneycroft and Michael Jopling, both of whom are neutral and who are entirely ready to use their influence with the National Union in whatever way you think best. A number of quite acceptable resolutions have been put in and, as you know, the choice has to be made at the end of the month.

I hope you will agree with me that we should seek to get a debate. I am, of course, absolutely ready to discuss it with you at any time you like.

Yours ever

Humphrey

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher M.P.,
Prime Minister,
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