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PRIME MINISTER

Enoch Powell

I had a private talk this morning with my colleagues on MISC 24 about Enoch Powell's claim to have struck a deal with Airey Neave. Obviously, until we know just what this alleged deal was supposed to have been, and get some idea of Powell's intentions, it is not possible to reach any firm views on how we should play it; but it may be helpful to you to have our views on the line you might take with him when you see him tomorrow.

We suggest the first point is to rebut firmly any accusation he may make of bad faith. None of us had any knowledge of this alleged deal, and policy on Northern Ireland has therefore had to be developed without taking account of it. (Powell has in fact exacerbated matters by remaining silent for so long even though it must have been clear to him months ago that things were not going the way he - presumably - expected).

He must also be told that the Government collectively is now firmly committed to the principles set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of Cmnd. 7763 - the Working Paper issued for the recent Conference. We cannot now go back on that, particularly the principle of "acceptability", and the need to make "reasonable and appropriate arrangements to take account of the interests of the minority". Given the facts of political life in Northern Ireland this is just real-politik. We cannot impose something which either side of the communal divide will reject. Powell will no doubt favour the "local government - British style" solution; and this too we could adopt if, but only if, both sides in Northern Ireland will agree to it. But he cannot expect us at this stage to abandon the road we are now treading and expose ourselves to what would then be well-qualified charges

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of having misled all concerned in Northern Ireland and in Parliament about our real intentions. Indeed, even if such a course were one we could contemplate in principle, the consequences in Northern Ireland - in terms of the ending of any hope of an acceptable settlement and of the security consequences which might follow, with the minority totally disillusioned at apparent British duplicity - would be such as to give us serious pause. We are not conducting an academic seminar.

Perhaps when you have had your meeting with Powell and we know more precisely what it is he is seeking it would be helpful if I and my MISC 24 colleagues, at our next meeting, were to consider the delicate political implications of all this further.

I am copying this to the other members of MISC 24 and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Wor

30 April 1980

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