

CONFIDENTIAL

cc Master set.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

P.A. 2/11
6/7

Northern Ireland

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland called on the Prime Minister on 4 July, at 1730 at No. 10, to have a preliminary word about the situation in Northern Ireland in advance of the meeting of OD in the following week.

The Prime Minister first told Mr. Atkins about the telephone conversation which she had just had with President Carter, during which he had asked her if she could provide him with background briefing on Northern Ireland which he could use in the talks which he expected to have with Senator Edward Kennedy and Speaker O'Neill. The Prime Minister asked Mr. Atkins if he would arrange for a suitable paper to be prepared: anything which was for President Carter's eyes only should be contained in a separate note. Mr. Atkins said that he welcomed this opportunity to brief President Carter and would arrange for the paper to be prepared as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Atkins went on to say that he would be submitting a long paper to OD; what he needed from the meeting was the approval of his colleagues for the course of action which he was pursuing. He was approaching his contacts with Northern Ireland politicians in the only way he knew, namely through individual and very private talks. He thought this approach was best and that, providing his talks remained private, he might succeed in persuading some of the politicians to come out of their corners. Mr. Atkins said that he was on very good personal terms both with Ian Paisley and with Gerry Fitt.

* ~ Passage deleted and closed, 40 years,
under a FOI Exemption.

Wayland, 20 October 2009

* In the
meantime, a crucial factor was Dublin's attitude: the Border
Jurisdiction Act provided a continuing test of Irish intentions and
a key case was shortly coming up which would provide an indication
of their attitude. Mr. Atkins said that he saw a few glimmers of
hope in the situation. The Northern Irish were more prepared to

/ deal with the

deal with the new Conservative Government than they had been with Labour, because they knew that the Conservatives had a five-year term ahead of them. Gerry Fitt still hankered after a Sunningdale solution and power-sharing; but was beginning to accept that this was not any longer a realistic objective.

Mr. Atkins told the Prime Minister that Ian Paisley wanted to be Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. He might be prepared to make some concessions in order to achieve his ambition. Mr. Atkins said that he proposed to ask Mr. Paisley straight out whether he did wish to become Prime Minister and, in the light of Paisley's reply, to gauge what concessions he might be willing to make. The Prime Minister expressed some doubts about this: if Paisley failed to become Prime Minister, he would be likely to withdraw whatever he had conceded. Mr. Atkins said that he thought Paisley would fail but that his ambition might help to loosen up the situation.

Mr. Atkins went on to say that the Ulster Unionists, following their very bad showing in the European elections, were now in disarray; Paisley was the only respected politician among them. The Unionists were, however, beginning to talk about safeguards for the minority, which was a hopeful sign.

Mr. Atkins asked the Prime Minister whether she would be willing to talk to Cardinal Hume about the situation in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister said that she had already done so, when the Cardinal had called on her shortly after she had taken office and she had not been encouraged by his very naive approach to some aspects of the situation.

Mr. Atkins told the Prime Minister that his recent talks in Dublin had gone well and that the Irish had seemed a little shamefaced about their recent behaviour.

ghl.