

Prime Minister

NORTHERN IRELAND

1. I set out below the text of a confidential Minute of today's date which was sent by the Chief Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer:-

"Northern Ireland

You kindly enquired after my views on the Paper C(80)31 proposing a constitutional initiative in Northern Ireland.

I understand the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was commissioned by the relevant Cabinet Committee to undertake such an initiative. That decision was error bordering on folly.

In my view the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made the best of an impossible commission. Even so I think his proposals will be generally rejected. Little will have been achieved, and a gesture will have been undertaken that was not consistent with our Manifesto declaration on Northern Ireland.

I sometimes wonder if there is not now a significant element in the Conservative Party who want to shake off the Northern Ireland attachment to the United Kingdom."

2. John Biffen read this out to me on the telephone this morning, and authorised me to pass it on to you.

3. I told him to "speak up" in Cabinet.

4. The Finance Bill Committee Stage is almost complete, and John Biffen is now feeling buoyant once again.

5. You may like to mention to him that his performance on the BBC Panorama programme on Monday was superb.

25th June, 1980

Ian Gow.