

SECRET

4

1/41

L.R.

N. B. P. R.

ML 25/3

NIOM(82) 2nd Meeting.

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE ON FRIDAY
19 MARCH 1982.

Present: Mr Burns (in the chair)

Mr Blelloch)
Mr Abbott)
Mr Alexander) NIO
Mr Fisher)
Mr Bates)

Mr Stephens)
Mr Jackson)
Col Morton) MOD
Maj Hughes)
Maj Wynne-Davies)

Mr Snoxell - FCO
Mr Colvin - Cabinet Office

Security

1. On most criteria, security had been going well since the murder of the Rev Bradford in November 1981 - the RUC had made a large number of important arrests leading to charges, often based on information received from informers. PIRA and INLA were under pressure; but hard core terrorists were that much more difficult to reach, and were more inclined to strike out viciously. They were quite likely to choose their targets with a view to maximum impact (cf the attempted murder of the Lord Chief Justice).

2. Loyalist paramilitary groups had not been engaging in violence to any significant extent recently. The "Third Force", after a quiet period, had recently mounted a show of force (significantly, in the relatively safety of Co Down). Its existence continued to be a cause for concern, and there was a distinct possibility of a confrontation between it and the security forces in the next few months. Arising from "Third Force" activities last Autumn, some 50 cases had been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions with a view to charges being brought.

3. There had been a number of significant finds of explosives in the Republic and co-operation with the security forces there remained

SECRET

D.R.

good. This did not appear to have been affected by the change of Government. Talks between the two Attorneys General on ways of dealing with fugitive offenders had been dormant and the UK would be pressing the Republic to resume these.

4. Some 230 prisoners remained on the no work protest at Maze compared with over 500 during the first hunger strike. The number was falling slowly but was unlikely to show any dramatic reduction.

H Block campaigners were believed to be giving thought to a further publicity campaign, possibly focussing on Republican prisoners in British prisons. A protest campaign by Loyalist prisoners at the temporary court adjacent to Maze prison seemed to be about length of time spent on remand and their wanting to be segregated from Republican prisoners. Maghaberry prison would open at about the end of the year; crucial decisions would be needed before then about the compound accommodation at Maze. There were no plans for a guard force at Maghaberry.

Policy decisions would also need to be taken on life sentence prisoners; we were reaching the point in time when a number might be released if ^{the} average length of custody of 'lifers' in G.B. prisons became the adopted yardstick in NI.

5. The Home Secretary had recently announced a review of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976, and as a consequence the Northern Ireland Secretary intended to announce in July his willingness in principle to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 also being reviewed. But this review would not start until that of the former was complete.

6. As to the security outlook, it was not yet clear whether trouble was to be expected over Easter, but the anniversaries of the deaths of Bobby Sands and the other hunger strikers might well be occasions for demonstrations.

Political

7. The Secretary of State had continued to hold talks with the political parties, particularly the OUP and the SDLP, but the results had not been encouraging. The SDLP thought the "Irish dimension" of the Secretary of States constitutional proposals was not strong

enough; the OUP felt just the opposite and also objected to the requirement for cross-community support. The OUP had withdrawn from further talks until the White Paper was produced. The Democratic Unionist Party had kept its head down and appeared to be quite keen to fight an election despite their disappointing show at the South Belfast by election.

8 Proposals were to be put to OD Committee on 25 March (and Cabinet on 1 April) with a draft White Paper and Bill. The Bill would provide for committees of the Assembly to shadow the work of Northern Ireland Departments; and partial or full devolution or even stage-by-stage devolution of powers was possible. In essence, the Bill provided that if a proposal for devolving powers secured the support of 70% of the Assembly Members, the Secretary of State would be required to put it before Parliament; and, if it seemed to him to command cross-party support, he would commend it to Parliament. If a proposal failed the 70% test, but seemed to the Secretary of State to have cross party support, he would have discretion to recommend this to Parliament. It seemed likely that all the major parties would fight the election and take their seats. The time-table was an extremely tight one; if a Bill were not passed in the present session, momentum could be lost and legislation would be over-shadowed by the prospect of the next General Election. Publication of the White Paper and the Bill was therefore desirable before Easter. The Taoiseach had called on the UN Secretary-General and, according to the Irish Press raised the subject of Northern Ireland; but UN staff had denied this to the UK Mission.

9 There was no question of security policy being devolved; the Order in Council procedure for legislating on reserved (including law and order) matters would be retained. But it was unrealistic to expect that the Assembly would not take an interest in security matters, and it seemed right to provide a channel for this, in the form of a Committee.

The Economy

10 Unemployment had not risen significantly in the last few months and stood at about 19.5%. Redundancies had been announced by a number of large firms, including British Enkalon and unexpectedly at Moygashel (Dungannon). The immediate prospects of

Harland and Wolff had improved; it would become clear around Easter whether De Lorean could be salvaged,

SECRET

F.R.

A collective Ministerial meeting might be needed if its complete collapse ^{became} inevitable. The Kinsale Gas Project had been taken as far as it could by officials and their respective positions were clear; the matter now needed to be pursued at Ministerial level.

Kincora

9. The inquiry by Sir George Terry into allegations about the way in which the police had conducted enquiries into this affair (and oversight of the continuing investigations) would take about 2/3 months. Allegations continued to be made but they were not substantially different to those made earlier. In the event of an inquiry being established with powers to compel the attendance of witnesses, the Home Office would need to be consulted if any question arose of the attendance of Colin Wallace (formerly employed at HQNI but now in custody in Maidstone prison).

Northern Ireland Office

24 March 1982

SECRET