



Ireland

10 DOWNING STREET

Discussed with Prime Minister.

Comments conveyed to Mr.

John

Hopkins in N.I.O.

A.F.C. 16/6

Mr Prior wants to publish his <sup>h-a</sup>an  
defense of his devolution proposals  
in the Daily Telegraph tomorrow,  
and is intending to speak to the  
Editor at 3.00 pm accordingly.

He would therefore like the  
Prime approval as soon as possible.

He is anxious to get it published

before any guideline of the Bill  
is announced (possibly tomorrow?)  
especially because of paragraph 7.

W.H. 16/6



# Northern Ireland Office

Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AJ  
Telephone Enquiries 01-233-4626

Bernard

Mr Prior's article for the  
Daily Telegraph is attached.

I would appreciate clearance as  
soon as possible please, for the  
reason outlined in the second  
paragraph.

*With the compliments of the Press Office*

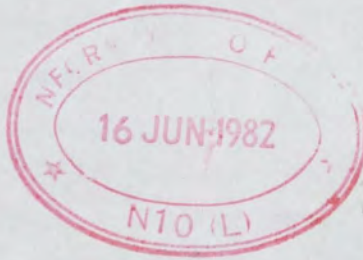
Liz D  
16/6/82

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E.R. Belfast copies by Mufax

cc: PS/SofS (L&B) - M  
Mr Wyatt - M  
Mr Blatherwick - M  
Miss Drummond  
Mr Shepherd

Mr Gilliland - M



DAILY TELEGRAPH ARTICLE

The Secretary of State was grateful for the revised version of the article and for your further passages designed to personalise it. During the course of last night's proceedings on the Bill he and Mr Scott worked further on the text, and I attach a revised version. You and other recipients of this note may care to judge how it now reads in the cold light of day.

Time is however short. The Secretary of State is anxious if possible to *secure* publication for tomorrow, Thursday - that is to say before there has been any announcement in that day's business statement about a guillotine. If there is to be a guillotine, from Friday onwards the article might well have to reflect it, which would detract from the point we seek to make.

Deedes  
is in  
the USA.

[ He will therefore speak to Mr Deedes as soon as he can during the course of today; we will let you know the outcome. ]

pp S W BOYS SMITH

16 June 1982

1. Confronted with yet another set of Government measures designed to provide constitutional advance in Northern Ireland I can well understand why some people's immediate reaction is "why bother?" Previous attempts have failed. The present proposals have aroused much hostility across the Northern Ireland political spectrum and have, (not least in this newspaper,) been criticised as unnecessary or misguided.
  
2. Yet while I respect these criticisms and the motives of those who advance them I fervently believe that they are wrong and welcome the chance to explain why the Government has brought forward its proposals and to correct some misapprehensions about them.
  
3. The starting point has to be that no one who knows Northern Ireland can fail to be appalled by the declining economy of the Province, the deeply worrying problems of security and the political stagnation as a result of which for over 10 years now the people of the Province have had little opportunity to exercise responsibility over their affairs. The Government is doing what can be done to help revive the economy and has put its weight firmly behind the security forces in their battle against the terrorist. But we need to move ahead on the political front too. The absence of a political forum in the Province has been bad for politics; with no outlet for political expression the men of violence all too often fill the vacuum. To help in winning the fight for investment and the battle against the terrorist, we need to develop political institutions in the Province which will enable the community to tackle their problems effectively and show outsiders that Ulster is a place with a future. We need to get the political process moving again.

4. Further, one has to concede that despite its fairness and increasing efficiency, the present system of direct rule does not provide the best answer to this problem. None of the major UK parties has an electoral base in Northern Ireland. Control therefore rests with British Ministers who unlike their counterparts in Scotland and Wales do not stand for election in the Province. Direct rule may be benign, but it is not representative. I am bound to say that I find the people of Northern Ireland extremely friendly, extremely generous and possessed of a wit and humanity which very greatly appeals to me. If I were to represent directly the people of Northern Ireland I would consider it a great privilege but I represent an English constituency and, however long I may be here, I am not an elected representative of the Northern Ireland people.

5. Some people would suggest that substantial powers should now be restored to local councils in the Province or a new province-wide upper tier of local government be formed. Some - a section of the Ulster Unionist Party and an even smaller section of my own - believe that the future lies in integration with Great Britain, in treating Northern Ireland like Yorkshire, as they frequently put it. (The Government simply do not believe this is the answer.) Few people in Northern Ireland want integration; most reject it or regard it as very much a second-best. The Province has a tradition of devolved government that has shaped its institutions, its habits and above all its politics, which turn on constitutional rather than economic or social issues. And within the community there exist two identities - those who think of themselves as British and those who think of themselves as Irish. Differences in Northern Ireland <sup>are</sup> substantial; it is very likely that integration would turn

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out to be direct rule under another name. Nor would local government reform be much help. The dilemma of how responsibility should be exercised would still have to be faced if local councils or a new upper tier were given greater powers. We should also remember that there is much evidence that the return of powers to local councils would not command widespread support within the community, and that there exists in Northern Ireland an administrative machine designed to underpin a devolved government. Nor could local government reform alone provide for a return of powers over the wider concerns of government - education, commerce, employment or eventually perhaps security, all of which many people in the Province feel should be under Ulster control.

cf  
Scotland

6. The Government's view is therefore that neither direct rule, nor integration, nor local government reform, nor indeed a combination of any of them, offers the best way forward. The majority of people in the Province favour devolution and we believe that they should be given a fresh opportunity to work together towards this objective.

7. Our own proposals have been criticised by the Unionist parties because they do not lay down the requirement of majority rule and by non-Unionists because they do not specify power-sharing on the pattern of the 1974 Assembly. Indeed, they neither prescribe nor prohibit any particular system. The Government does not wish to impose its own scheme, or the scheme favoured by one part of the Ulster community, in Northern Ireland. What we can do, and have a duty to do, is to introduce a framework within which local politicians have the opportunity to devise new institutions which fit the needs of the Province. For these new institutions to be stable, they must enjoy the confidence of both sides of the community.

A system which cannot secure the loyalty of a significant section of the community will not provide the conditions in which the problems which affect everyday life in Northern Ireland can best be tackled. This is why our proposals require that any scheme proposed by the Assembly for the devolution of powers should enjoy wide-spread support throughout the community. Without such support, it will fail.

8. One other matter needs to be emphasised: in no way do our proposals affect the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. The 1973 Constitutional Act continues to ensure that on this issue the wishes of the majority of the people of the Province will be paramount and in no event will Northern Ireland cease to be part of the UK unless the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wish it. Devolution is not a half-way house to Irish unity; indeed, its unionist proponents see it as the best way to preserve the Union.

9. The Government believe that a fresh effort must be made to restart political dialogue in Northern Ireland, and a fresh opportunity be given for people in the Province to exert democratic control over their own affairs. No one pretends that this will be easy to achieve. It may take some time before a new Assembly is ready to ask Westminster to devolve powers to it. The alternative is not the status quo, but the continuation of the slow political and economic decline of the past dozen years. In my relatively short time in Northern Ireland I have grown to appreciate the dedication and the ability of those who have contributed so much to the industrial reputation of the Province. I have done and I will continue to do everything in my power within the framework of the Government's policy to help to reverse this economic decline. I have seen at

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first hand and I have the greatest admiration for the determination of the Northern Ireland people to overcome the obstacles and difficulties which face them in a relatively isolated position. We in Government have an obligation to work towards the best possible political and economic improvements which we can achieve even in the midst of the fearful problems.