



Ref. A082/0050

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet: Parliamentary Affairs: Recommendations for Parliamentary
Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

BACKGROUND

FLAG A The Home Secretary minuted you on 4 November about the outcome of the discussion in H Committee on the handling of the reports of the four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions. The Secretary of State FLAG B for Northern Ireland minuted you separately on 2 November about the report of the Northern Ireland Commission.

2. H Committee agreed that as a matter of tactics the English, Scottish and Welsh Commissions' reports, which are expected in January or February, should be laid before Parliament as soon as possible after receipt, so as to keep to the minimum the time available for representations for modification of the Commissions' proposals. This would be in line with what was done in 1954, when only eight days elapsed between the receipt and the laying of each report, though in 1969 there was a much longer delay and in the end the Labour Government acted only when faced with imminent court proceedings.

3. Each report, when laid, has to be accompanied by a draft Order (or draft Orders) in Council implementing its recommendations, with or without modification. In 1969, the Labour Government laid one draft Order for each report, and the incoming Conservative Government simply moved debate on the same draft Orders. H Committee agreed that this precedent should be followed for the present reports, rather than reverting to the procedure adopted in 1954 when 52 draft Orders dealing with separate counties in England, Scotland and Wales were laid.

4. After the Orders in Council have been made, the Secretary of State needs to make further Orders designating the returning officers for the new constituencies. The Government's declared aim is to have the new arrangements in force in time for a General Election in the autumn of 1983 or later, but it would probably be possible to be ready in time for an Election in June 1983. The



Labour Party has begun proceedings for an injunction to prevent the Boundary Commissioners for England from submitting their report, and the hearing has been set down for 22 November. The Attorney General thinks that the chances of the action succeeding are slim, and that in the event of an appeal it should be possible to expedite the proceedings and avoid any disruption of the timetable.

5. The report of the Northern Ireland Commission has already been received. It recommends that in accordance with the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1979 (which increases the number of Northern Ireland seats from 12 to 17, subject to the Commission's power to vary the number to 16 or 18) there should be 17 Northern Ireland seats. In their supplementary report, the Commission, in discharge of their functions under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973, recommend that each of the 17 Parliamentary constituencies should return five members to the Northern Ireland Assembly. This would increase the total membership of the Assembly from the 78 specified in the Constitution Act to 85, but is considered by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland not to conflict with the condition in the Act that the Commission are not to make recommendations whose effect would be "substantially to alter" the figure of 78. Mr Prior, in his minute of 2 November, seeks agreement to early laying of the report before Parliament, together with a single draft implementing Order.

6. H Committee did not dissent from this way of proceeding, which is in line with their own conclusions on the handling of the other three reports, but felt that the political sensitivity of any proposals to vary Northern Ireland representation so soon after the recent Assembly elections required that the Cabinet be given an opportunity to discuss and endorse the Secretary of State's proposal.

HANDLING

7. You will wish to avoid reopening the conclusions reached by H Committee on the handling of the English, Scottish and Welsh Commissions' reports. The Home Secretary can summarise the position reached in H Committee, and the Secretary of State for Northern



Ireland can briefly explain the background to his minute of 2 November. The Cabinet will no doubt agree that there can be no question of modifying the Northern Ireland Commission's recommendations, and that the aim should be to handle them as far as possible in accordance with the precedents which H Committee propose to follow for the Great Britain reports. The Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip may be able to assess the likely strength of the Parliamentary opposition to the proposed draft Order, and to say whether it would be helpful for Northern Ireland Ministers to have any preliminary discussion with selected Conservative MPs or Northern Ireland Members before the report and draft Order are laid, or between their laying and the ensuing debate.

CONCLUSION

8. Subject to the course of the discussion, the Cabinet might:
- (i) Agree that the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission Report and implementing draft Order should be laid as soon as possible.
 - (ii) Invite the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in consultation with the Lord President and the Lord Privy Seal, to arrange early debates on the Report and draft Order in both Houses.
 - (iii) Invite the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to arrange for the Commission's recommendations to be explained to Northern Ireland Members and possible opponents on the Government side in advance of any debate.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

10 November 1982



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

18 November 1982

Mr Murdo MacLean
12 Downing Street
SW1

Wm
18/11

Dear Mr. Maclean,

REPORTS OF THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

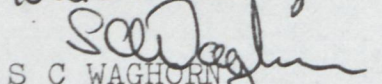
At Cabinet on 11 November, our Secretary of State was invited, in consultation with the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip, to arrange for the above Report and the draft Order in Council implementing that Report to be laid before Parliament as soon as possible.

It is now proposed to lay these Reports as a Command paper on Tuesday, 23 November, and I should be grateful if you could confirm that the Chief Whip sees no objection to this timing.

I understand that the Lord Privy Seal's Office have been informally consulted and are content with this proposal.

I am copying this letter to the Lord Privy Seal's Private Secretary and, with a proof copy of the Boundary Commission Reports, to Michael Pattison at No 10 Downing Street.

Yours sincerely.


S C WAGHORN
Parliamentary Clerk

② Publication of Report.



10 DOWNING STREET

~~Robin~~

Wilkie

Thanks.

FERB

I imagine you will wish to^{9.11}
put this to the PM yourself.
She should clearly see it tonight.

My only comment is on the last
paragraph of the statement. I
think this will have to say
that the PM is consulting
Lord Bridge and Mr Foot about a
referral to the Security Commission.

① I do not see how we can agree
a referral before Thursday.
Unless of course we pull all the
stops out.

W/M 9/11