

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH THE DEFENCE SECRETARY: NORTHERN IRELAND

The Defence Secretary is coming to see you on Monday morning for a private word about Northern Ireland. His main purpose will be to convey some of the concerns of the CGS about the army's role in Northern Ireland and restraints on it. The upshot is that the army is not able to act as effectively as it could in dealing with Irish terrorism. It may even be losing the battle.

His specific concerns are:-

- the quality of intelligence which the police make available for the army. He believes that more could be done to improve co-ordination between them.
- excessive remission of sentences of convicted terrorists, which brings them back into the IRA's ranks far too soon.
- the need to make more use of Special Forces to mount actions like Loughall. The reason that more effective use is not made of these forces is again lack of adequate intelligence.

You will want to discuss with Mr Younger how he thinks we should proceed, if these problems are to be dealt with. They would seem to require consultation with the Northern Ireland Secretary and, in the case of excessive remission of sentences, with the Home Secretary and Lord Chancellor. It is not clear to me whether Mr Younger will ask for the appointment of a very senior figure as intelligence co-ordinator in Northern Ireland; or whether he thinks the problem can be overcome by persuading the RUC to pass more of the intelligence which they have to the army.

In any event I do not think that the outcome of this meeting can be more than procedural. The next step may be to bring together a very small group of Ministers and perhaps the Heads of Agencies for a talk.

C.D.P

Charles Powell

10 July 1987