

PRIME MINISTER

ORDERS IN COUNCIL FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Following this morning's discussion in Cabinet, Mr. King has discussed with the Lord President whether the Privy Council should consider at its meeting next week the Orders in Council which would, among other things, permit the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to put Commissioners into the local authorities in Northern Ireland with powers to set rates.

The Lord President's office tell me that while the Lord President does not relish these Orders, he believes them to be an essential precaution in the present situation. The situation is too dangerous in the Province to do without them. He hopes, nevertheless, that the powers conferred by the Orders need not be used.

The Northern Ireland Office make the following points to me:

1. The situation in Northern Ireland can be distinguished from that on the mainland. In Northern Ireland 18 out of the 26 Councils are potentially affected. There are other means of achieving the objective, but such means are, they say, very cumbersome and might not, in the long run be effective.
2. The Northern Ireland Office would try to avoid use of the powers. Indeed, taking the powers would, so they argue, display firmness which could encourage some of the more moderate authorities to set a rate.
3. The NIO has given a broad, but unspecific, indication of what he has in mind in the Parliamentary Answer attached.

NIO tell me that they have not had any discussion with DoE about this matter. They clearly should have done.

Mr. King is very anxious for the Orders to be considered by Privy Council Office at their meeting next week. If you are unconvinced of the need for the Orders described above he would be ready to talk to you about this on the telephone tomorrow.

Do you wish to do that?

Or

Shall I tell his office that subject to the agreement of DoE Ministers (which he must seek urgently) you are prepared for the Orders to be made by the Privy Council at its meeting next week?

How would you like to proceed?

N.L.W.

Go ahead - but inform
DoE of intentions

ms

(N. L. WICKS)
6 February 1986

SRWAOG

preliminary investigations will be carefully examined with a view to considering whether these guiding principles can be further improved. The exhaustive investigation undertaken by the inquiry did not bring to light any evidence of an official cover-up of homosexual affairs involving children and young people in residential care. However, the report draws attention to errors and weaknesses which the committee discovered in the operation of the child care system and while acknowledging the progress which has been made goes on to make a series of recommendations for further improvement.

I am confident that close study of the report will reassure the public that the various complaints and allegations which circulated regarding abuse in the child care system have been meticulously investigated and that a door has been closed on the past. I am also pleased to endorse the comments made in the report about the valuable work done by social workers in Northern Ireland and I concur with the inquiry in hoping that its outcome will help restore their personal and professional confidence in the way they do their demanding work.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the number of private firearms certificates currently issued in Northern Ireland together with such information as he has regarding the distribution of such certificates between nationalist and loyalist communities; and if he will state the number of certificates held by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and its Reserve.

Mr. Scott: On 31 December 1985, 88,340 firearms certificates were on issue to persons in Northern Ireland. Information on the political affiliation of holders of firearms certificates is not kept. Information about the total number of private firearms certificates held by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

District Rates

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provisions have been made for setting a district rate in the 18 local councils currently adjourned in protest over the Anglo-Irish agreement.

Mr. Needham: Northern Ireland district councils have a statutory duty to make a district rate for 1986-87 not later than 15 February 1986. It is a matter for each individual council to make arrangements to meet this requirement. If any council fails to make a rate by this date, the Government will take whatever action is necessary to secure the exercise of this function, either by the use of default powers in existing legislation or, if necessary, by taking additional powers.

Victoria Barracks Flats

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why security staff have been withdrawn from the Victoria barracks flats complex.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I understand from the

chairman that the executive's employment of specialist security staff at Victoria barracks was discontinued in January 1986 when it became clear that the service, which had been provided for some 18 months, was ineffective in preventing both vandalism to the communal areas and the illegal occupation of some flats.

Prison Population

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the size of the present prison population in Northern Ireland categorised by age and by sex in the following groups: under 18 years, 18 to 25 years, 25 to 30 years, 30 to 40 years, 40 to 50 years, 50 to 60 years and over 60 years old; and if he will give a breakdown of the length of sentence being served by percentage of the total prison population;

(2) if he will give details of the number of prisoners currently in Northern Ireland prisons, of the age structure of convicted prisoners in the prisons of Northern Ireland and of the number of convicted prisoners serving sentences for terrorist-type offences.

Mr. Scott [pursuant to his reply, 3 February 1986]: At 24 November 1985 (the latest date for which figures in this detail are available) there was a total of 1,713 sentenced prisoners in Northern Ireland prison establishments. This figure includes inmates at the young offenders centre. The age distribution of the sentenced prison population is as follows:

	Male	Female
Under 18 years	35	—
18 years up to 25 years	521	5
25 years up to 30 years	508	8
30 years up to 40 years	506	6
40 years up to 50 years	101	2
50 years up to 60 years	16	—
60 years and over	5	—

The percentage distribution of sentenced population by length of sentence is as follows:

Length of sentences	Per cent.
Under 6 months	11.15
6 months to 1 year	3.04
1 year to 18 months	10.16
18 months to 2 years	0.29
2 years to 4 years	11.03
4 years to 10 years	17.16
10 years and over	21.37
Life	22.42

Young persons detained during the pleasure of the Secretary of State—3.39.

Of the 1,713 sentenced prisoners in custody on 24 November 1985, 1,211 were serving sentences for scheduled offences.

Terrorism

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the number of cases in which persons were convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland in 1985 on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown and in which evidence other than that of the accomplice, either forensic, from witnesses other than convicted terrorists or by an admission of guilt from the accused, was also used to obtain the conviction.