



010

PRIME MINISTER

Rice Austin
CDD
8/5

MS

2

DECLARATIONS BY CANDIDATES IN NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTIONS

In view of its unusually wide implications, I am minuting to keep you in touch with H Committee's consideration of the Northern Ireland Secretary's proposal to issue a consultation paper canvassing the idea that candidates in Northern Ireland district and assembly elections should be required to take an oath that they would neither support nor assist the activities of a proscribed organisation. As you will appreciate, the proposal is directed at Sinn Fein councillors whose open support for the IRA has outraged a broad spectrum of unionist opinion, and the Committee had very considerable sympathy with the Northern Ireland Secretary's objective of doing something about this problem. At our meeting on 1 May, however, the Committee expressed some caution about the device of declarations on candidature to elected office.

2. In the first place, it was thought that the problems of enforcing a declaration could be considerable, and that Sinn Fein might exploit it in ingenious ways. Second, there was some doubt about the political consequences within Northern Ireland - both as regards the detaching of nationalist support from Sinn Fein and in securing a genuine and lasting improvement in our relations with the unionist community. Finally, there was a degree of anxiety that the implications for electoral law in the rest of the United Kingdom might run deeper than had been appreciated.

3. We therefore invited the Northern Ireland Secretary to take the matter forward by producing a revised draft consultation paper taking account of the points made at our meeting. We also asked him for a further analysis of the reasons why the Government



had decided not to proscribe Sinn Fein, and for an assessment of the implications of the proposal for elections in Great Britain. I shall keep you in touch with developments.

4. I am sending a copy of this minute to the members of H Committee, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Attorney General and Sir Robert Armstrong.

hgd

[Handwritten flourish]

Privy Council Office
8 May 1986