



Refers to
Mallaby to
COP 22/5/86

5

10 DOWNING STREET

① C F I B F

Please keep this
until my return
from London, &
until we receive
the promised
minutes from

here // the defence
service ←
COP

S/S MOD
22/5/86
on file

② Await Mr Mallaby's draft
23/5/86



20

MO 19/3E

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELANDCONTINGENCY PLANNING

You sent me a copy of your minute of 29th April to the Prime Minister summarising the latest position on contingency planning against the possibility of industrial disruption in the Province for political purposes.

2. It is of course vital to demonstrate the Government's determination that a political strike will not be allowed to succeed. Effective contingency plans to keep essential services running are crucial to this end. The Armed Forces have a key role in these plans and their contribution would make a considerable call on already stretched manpower, particularly in the specialist fields. Even so, the availability of senior and technical management will be essential to the success of the contingency arrangements, particularly in such fields as the power stations, water and sewage and liquid fuel.

3. There is one aspect of your contingency plans which causes me concern. In Paragraph 20 of the Memorandum attached to your



minute you suggest that troops should take on the role of Prison Officers in the event of widespread strikes involving the Prison Service. Although I would naturally have no objection to soldiers providing ancillary staff in prisons and the perimeter guards in accordance with long-standing arrangements, it has always been envisaged hitherto that the RUC would fill the role of warders and any other tasks which brought them into direct contact with prisoners. This role requires special training and experience and the Army have only a few such men, who would not be sufficient to man all the prisons in Northern Ireland. In my view it would be quite wrong to expect an ordinary infantry soldier to be able to cope effectively as a prison officer facing some of the most dangerous criminals in Europe. There is a real risk that serious incidents could arise if untrained soldiers were to perform this role and there could also be significant presentational and other difficulties. I believe that it would therefore be more appropriate to plan on duties involving direct contact with prisoners being carried out by RUC officers. I understand that our officials are still considering the issue and I hope ways can be found of resolving it satisfactorily.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Prime Minister and other members of OD(I), and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence

22 May 1986

R. Heff
(Approved by the Secretary of State
and signed in his absence)

N. Ireland; Situation





SECRET

B.07434

MR POWELL

cc Mr Unwin
Mr Stark

Contingency Planning for Northern Ireland

I offered to provide advice on the Northern Ireland Secretary's minute of 29 April to the Prime Minister. I understand that the Defence Secretary will shortly send a minute to the Prime Minister on points of concern to him. When that has arrived, I will submit a draft minute for the Prime Minister.

2. I have discussed the subject with Mr Unwin as Deputy Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Unit. We agree that there is no early prospect of serious strikes in Northern Ireland. But the very fact that the Government has had so long to make contingency plans would intensify the criticism if those plans turned out to be defective. We have several points of concern -

a. It is most important that Ministers, in deciding how to deal with any threatened strikes in Northern Ireland, should have a clear idea of how long the contingency plans would maintain essential services. This could be a key factor in overall policy on such strikes. The Northern Ireland Secretary states (paragraph 4 of his minute) that it is unlikely that the contingency arrangements could be maintained for more than 3 weeks. I understand that there is no purely military justification for this statement. If true, it would represent a significant restriction on the Government's prospects of success in coping with a political strike. I believe that the Northern Ireland Secretary should be asked to explain his grounds for this conclusion.