

PRIME MINISTER

CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. King sent you a note about this (attached).

You did not in the event have time to discuss it with him.

There are some points to be made which I have discussed with the Cabinet Office.

Can I please write as in the attached?

Yes - Thanks on
ms

CDD?

C.D. POWELL

29 May 1986

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3. The Prime Minister agrees with the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Defence Secretary about the importance of management and senior technicians being available to work in the power stations and other utilities. Given the widespread opposition among Protestants in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, there must be a significant risk that many managers and senior technicians would not work during a strike. The Prime Minister therefore wonders whether we should consider the feasibility of importing the necessary management and technical personnel from Great Britain, to work at least in the fields of electricity generation and oil supplies. Feasibility will depend on technical questions among others - for instance whether the electricity generating plant in Northern Ireland is familiar to managers and technicians in Great Britain. This idea might be considered by the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Energy, at least in a preliminary way, without consulting people outside government at this stage.

4. The Prime Minister has noted the difficulty of producing contingency plans for the distribution of essential supplies any further than the distribution centres. She would be interested to know who would administer these centres and issue supplies to people who called for them.

5. Even though hospitals in Northern Ireland have not been affected by industrial action in the past, there must be some risk of this happening in the future. The Prime Minister suggests that an outline contingency plan would be a wise precaution. As regards ambulance services, the Prime Minister wonders whether we can be confident that voluntary organisations could cope during a prolonged strike and whether it would be prudent to have a contingency plan in case they could not.

6. The Prime Minister agrees with the Defence Secretary about the unsuitability of military personnel to act as warders in prisons or to undertake other tasks which would bring them into direct contact with prisoners.

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7. I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the other members of OD(I) and to Michael Stark in the Cabinet Office.