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Mr. Heath's statement in the House of Commons can be taken to be a measured and deliberate document. Much of it is concerned with the functions of the security forces in Northern Ireland; there is a compliment to Major Chichester-Clark; the real meat lies elsewhere. It is in the paragraph which reads -

"Considerable progress has been made during ~~Major Chichester-Clark's~~ term of office in social and economic measures, and in institutional changes, designed to ensure equality and fairness for every citizen in Northern Ireland".

This phrase not only reaffirms the Downing Street Declaration but seems to recognise that institutional changes are necessary if the Declaration is to be implemented.

It is also in the last paragraph of Mr. Heath's statement which reads -

"Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and it is our firm purpose to work for the same standards there as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, whether it be in economic and social progress or in the maintenance of law and order. That is the object of the policies pursued by Rt. Hon. Gentlemen Opposite and by my colleagues and myself. The United Kingdom Government which has the ultimate authority and responsibility for Northern Ireland, will give its full support to any Government there which cooperates in implementing the policies which we judge right for those purposes".

The first phrase of the paragraph quoted above does not go on to say the usual things about the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as might be expected. The greatest significance that could be attached to this is that the Conservatives may be beginning the process of change from the traditional formula to the more progressive formula that the Minister mentioned to Sir Alec Douglas-Home last July and that we have pushed at official level on occasions since then. This is the most that can be read into the absence of the usual formula and may even be too much.

The very last sentence of the Heath statement makes it clear beyond doubt that Westminster intends to lay down policy for Stormont in the future. Stormont's autonomy, insofar as it has autonomy under the Government of Ireland Act in certain fields, is now more closely limited by the Heath statement and this is in accordance with the view we have expressed to the British, particularly arising out of the rifle club affair, that more Westminster control rather than less is needed in the North in order to prevent the Unionist Party from bedevilling both Britain's general policy and the Taoiseach's general policy.

The debate on Mr. Heath's statement clarified a number of matters. Mr. Heath, in reply to Mr. Wilson, reaffirmed that there would be no rearming of the RUC, no return of the B Specials and an examination by the British Government of the situation concerning the revocation of private gun licences. These are all extremely useful statements of policy and the last item confirms our speculation that Westminster was very embarrassed by the creation of rifle

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clubs of ex-B Specials and the issue of more gun licences in the North in the past year or two.

Certainly the Conservatives appear to have taken the measure of the Unionist Party and the bi-partisan approach of the Conservative and Labour Parties continues to be effective.

The later debate at the Conservative Home Affairs Committee appears to have been a difficult one for Mr. Maudling and Lord Carrington. The Westminster Unionists reportedly achieved substantial support for their views on the law and order issue and were "jubilant" at the end of the meeting. I do not think we should be overly concerned about this. As was the case all last week in Belfast and through the media the Unionists have played this card to the hilt. However, the issue is an emotional one bound to attract support from back-bench Tories. The emotion engendered is a useful substitute for hard thinking but calmer counsel, via the forthcoming Westminster debate and the normal activities of the Tory Whips, will probably take the heat out of this issue.

The Stormont Unionists would, I think, be ill-advised to attempt to pressurise Whitehall on the basis of what transpired at the Home Affairs Committee. Nor are Mr. Heath and his senior colleagues likely to be pleased with the success of the Westminster Unionists in whipping up the back-bench on tactical issues which Mr. Heath has clearly stated to be for decision by the GOC in the North.

In a sense, in working up the Torn back-benchers, the Westminster Unionists must have done further damage to their standing with the historic allies of traditional Unionism i.e. the Conservative Party as such and the British Army High command.

H. 23.3.71
