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NORTHERN IRELAND

Failure of Convention

Notes

1. These notes consider some aspects of

- (1) integration of Northern Ireland with the rest of the United Kingdom,
- (2) direct rule, as it is or modified,
- (3) "majority" government, either with or without a British presence,
- (4) withdrawal by the British, either soon or following a period of increasingly apparent disinterest in Northern Ireland, and
- (5) independence.

A conclusion is that perhaps the most likely option now is the continuance of direct rule with further attempts by the British to keep the political process going - following ultimately, if these attempts fail, by withdrawal which when it happens will be abrupt, and without notice.

2. The notes suggest the need for the government to -

- (1) consider their policies in relation to
 - (a) the SDLP, who may now be thinking of asking for a British withdrawal of support for the Loyalists involving ultimately a British withdrawal. This policy could be in conflict with what has been Government policy here of
 - (i) urging the British to discharge their responsibilities in Northern Ireland and
 - (ii) indicating that any change of the status of the North should be only with the consent of the majority of the population there; and
 - (b) the British who are now presumably formulating once again proposals for the future of Northern Ireland;
- (2) continue to build up the Permanent Defence Force to its establishment strength of 14,230 (as against a present strength of just over 12,000) and consider a tentative position in the event of widespread violence in Northern Ireland;
- (3) approve of a proposal confidentially to provide the Civil Defence Force here with provisions enabling them to cater for 20,000 or 50,000 refugees (at a cost of £600,000(?)) and to go ahead with certain other preparations for an emergency inflow of distressed persons from Northern Ireland;

- (4) consider certain proposals in relation to
 - (1) the reliability of the Northern auxiliary security forces
 - (2) British security briefings
 - (3) the alarmist attitude of the media here to Northern developments.

NORTHERN IRELAND

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Possibilities

These are so numerous, and unpredictable that only the broadest categorisations are worth discussion. Some of these are enumerated below.

1. INTEGRATION with the rest of the United Kingdom with Northern Ireland being ruled like, say, Wales. This would give the North an entrenched entitlement to financing similar to that of other regions and a better claim to more MPs in Westminster. It is not likely to be conceded because of -

- (1) British, and certainly Labour, antipathy to the idea of more Northern MPs and
- (2) the fear of a violent backlash from "nationalists" here. The re-action to Mr. Heath's talk of integration after the Baldonnell meeting with the Taoiseach in September, 1973, is worth recalling.

2. DIRECT RULE -

- (1) as it . This can be ruled out, as a medium term solution, as providing no safety valve through the democratic process for local feelings, and, therefore, leading to endless attacks on the administration, and continuing instability.
- (2) modified so as to provide some stronger form of local participation in Government. Modifications could cover -
 - (a) a central advisory or supervisory body, made up perhaps of the Westminster MPs from Northern Ireland, elected by proportional representation;
 - (b) a further reform of local government, giving elected authorities more power, and ensuring either by the manipulation of electoral areas, or administrative arrangement, that the different communities got fair treatment. (It is noteworthy that in the 1920s the reform of local government here was one of the first priorities of the new government).

Whatever the details a modified system of direct rule could not survive without some arrangements ensuring local participation by the two communities in the administration.

It would also require -

- (a) safeguards to ensure impartial administration of the law (as, say, housing allocations, appointments, civil rights etc.)
- (b) special consideration of responsibility for security.

Direct rule of some sort has been the policy enunciated consistently and almost automatically by every British representative to whom questions as to options if the Convention failed have been put. The crucial question is the extent to which repeated failures - at Darlington, Sunningdale, and now the Convention - have weakened British will.

3. "MAJORITY" GOVERNMENT - involving a Stormont type executive, without provision for "power-sharing" or other participation by the minority. The undertakings in favour of power sharing given by successive British Prime Ministers and Governments are so numerous and so explicit that the volte-face involved in open support for this type of Government is, I think, out. If it comes, it will come only as a prelude to or consequence of withdrawal.
4. INDEPENDENCE - The likelihood of negotiated independence is remote. Relevant points are -
 - (1) the impossibility of guarantees for the minority which are enforceable in the face of a hostile administration,
 - (2) the likelihood of the withdrawal of all or most of the British subvention of £450m. a year and
 - (3) the veto this country - and the UK and other countries of the Community would have on membership by Northern Ireland in the EEC. Without membership, economic stagnation or worse is a certainty there.

"Independence" if it came about, is most likely to result in some form of "repartition", which would create a besieged state in the North-East corner of this island and almost guarantee a continuance of violence.

5. WITHDRAWAL - If the British abandon direct rule or decide not to support a "majority" Government, their only real option is withdrawal.

Again, the undertakings against withdrawal have been numerous and public. However, circumstances have changed with -

- (1) the repeated refusal of the "Loyalists" to accept the authority of the Governments of the State to which they profess loyalty;
- (2) the economic position of the United Kingdom which is making the £450m. a year they are now putting into the North an increasingly serious consideration;
- (3) the effect on British public opinion of the bombing campaign in British cities. This could give momentum to a campaign "to get out and let them fight it out themselves"; or it is just possible that the campaign could not be sustained for long because -
 - (1) as the Birmingham bombs showed, there can be a strong backlash even among "nationalists" and
 - (2) the campaigns are difficult to support, and expensive in personnel, most of whom are caught - amongst a violently hostile population.

A decision for or against withdrawal and how it would come about in the face of these and other considerations is impossible to forecast. However, it is obviously desirable to take a view here on probabilities.

The Convention is unlikely to present its report to London until about the end of October or mid-November. This would then be studied for, say, a month or two - and, on present appearances, rejected. If these assumptions are right, the new British initiative would be announced late in 1975 or early in 1976. Unless, therefore, the unexpected happens - and in the North, it is, of course, as likely as not that it will happen - the next few months will be spent by London, once again, in evolving policy in Northern Ireland. This course of further reflection, with yet one more initiative, seems to be the most likely prospect. The initiative would be announced

or developed early in 1976 - and would be at that stage without prejudice to intentions or withdrawal from Northern Ireland.

The extent to which we should get ourselves involved in work on developing the form of the initiative needs consideration. If we are seen to be closely involved, the effect can be counterproductive in Northern Ireland, where Loyalist susceptibilities to Southern meddling are often underestimated. Again, it could be argued that - given our limited technical and administrative resources and the long British experience of running the North, - we can contribute only marginally. Further, the more we participate the more we facilitate the British in any plans they may be developing for shuffling off the Northern coil.

These are strong arguments against open and active participation. However, whether we like it or not, we are involved. The SDLP have come to us twice, in August, 1974, and again in August, 1975, asking for explicit answers to certain questions. Behind these questions is the provisional SDLP policy that if the Convention fails, the British Government should be asked to withdraw its support from the Loyalists, and that with the Dublin Government, they should provide joint guarantees for the security of the majority and minority in Northern Ireland. As it seems to be emerging, this policy would require the intervention of the Irish army north of the border and the SDLP are quite explicit on this - asking for the names of Army officers with whom they can communicate etc. They are also thinking of being appointed to act in the North as agents of the Irish Government - as the only sovereign government in this island, in the event of a British withdrawal (or, in fact, probably of a British indication of intention

to withdraw).

What would happen if the British said they were withdrawing can only be surmised. The most commonly held opinion is that majority and minority interests would attempt to consolidate their own position in the areas where they were strongest. This, bluntly, means civil war. What possible interest the British would have in maintaining "guaranties" in this situation is impossible to see. The most probable outcome is that they would get out as fast as their ships and planes would carry them.

It is, of course, hard to see them being quite so naive as to let themselves in for the sort of odium which the explicit operation of a policy like this would bring. However, what they do need not be explicit and open, to lead to the same conclusion. The important thing is that what the SDLP have apparently been thinking about off and on now for two years could if it were voiced openly by them lend support to what the British probably want to do anyway, and ultimately lead to anarchy in this island. This is apart altogether from the argument that in espousing this policy the SDLP would be explicitly urging what the provisionals have been saying for many years now. The identification of the SDLP with the men of violence could probably not be more complete.

At the same time, it is important by any means we can use to foster the democratic process in the North. The SDLP are the most cohesive and coherent of the elected representatives of the minority and, subject to the overriding interest of peace in this island, should be given as much help as possible. If they disappear, the men of violence could well be seen to have won.