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NOTE OF A MEETING OF MINISTERS HELD AT STORMONT CASTLE ON  
THURSDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 1971 AT 3 00 PM

PRESENT:           The Prime Minister  
                  The Minister in the Senate  
                  The Minister of Agriculture  
                  The Minister of Commerce  
                  The Minister of Development  
                  The Minister of State at the Ministry of Development  
                  The Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs  
                  The Minister of State at the Ministry of Finance  
                  The Attorney-General

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ALSO PRESENT:     The Secretary to the Cabinet  
                  The Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet  
                  The Principal

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Recalling that the Government had already announced its intentions about the establishment of Parliamentary Committees, the Prime Minister said that the other two main recommendations of the official Working Party - an increase in the size of the Commons and a change in the composition of the Senate - should be considered together with the related question of Proportional Representation. Many suggestions were coming from many sources as to political reform.

Lord Crowther was due to report next year, and it was imperative for the Government to be seen to be taking the initiative and not to be responding once again to outside pressures. Not only the nature of the decisions was important but their timing in relation to the Heath/Lynch talks, the re-opening of Parliament and the proposed visit by the Home Secretary.

While agreeing that it was essential for the Government to be seen to be showing further initiative and that there was merit in the proposals for the increase in size of the two Houses, Ministers were concerned lest any early decisions be taken as further concessions in the face of Republican demands or that by taking the decisions now the Home Secretary would be left with no bargaining counters for his proposed talks with Opposition Leaders.

As to PR, on which subject Ministers had before them two Papers, there was uncertainty as to its effects in the practical sense but general agreement that it could only be considered in conjunction with an enlargement of the Commons.

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The Minister in the Senate and the Chief Whip stressed the need for formal consultations with the Party but the dangers of premature disclosure of the Government's intentions were appreciated.

The Minister of Commerce thought that nothing short of executive power would satisfy the SDLP and that influential sections of the British press would not support any solution short of "Community Government" which existed in some European countries. The Prime Minister however rejected completely the idea of a Cabinet in which some members had as their objective the overthrow of the State.

It was agreed that to test the opinion of the Opposition, the Government Party, and the press and public generally, the Government's proposals should be ventilated in the form of a Green Paper which would:

- (a) indicate the merits of an increase in the size of the Commons and an increase in size and revised composition of the Senate;
- (b) argue both sides of the case about PR;
- (c) explain why Coalition Government including a Republican element was impossible but stressing that the inclusion in Government of Roman Catholics not dedicated to the destruction of the Constitution was feasible;
- (d) indicate that these matters could be constructively discussed only in the context of a return of all persons to Stormont; and
- (e) insist on an end to the present emergency before the new measures could be implemented.

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