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NOTE OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE HOME SECRETARY AND THE
PRIME MINISTER, 3 SEPTEMBER 1971

The conversation related to the draft announcement prepared by the Home Office and the Prime Minister's Telex message of 1 September, which had been answered in a further Telex message from Mr P J Woodfield on 2 September.

The Prime Minister said that the amendments included in Mr Woodfield's Telex of 2 September were a big improvement and he thought with one or two further amendments the revised draft would be acceptable. He would however have to clear it with his Cabinet and hoped very shortly to come back to the Home Secretary.

The Prime Minister said that his main reservation related to paragraph 4 of the Telex of 2 September. He made it clear to the Home Secretary that he would rule out forever the possibility of Republican MPs serving in a coalition Government. The Home Secretary replied that in not ruling out coalition forever the United Kingdom Government had had in mind the hope that in the years ahead politics in Northern Ireland could move on to a different basis but he saw no objection to amending the draft so as to rule out firmly the idea that a coalition might come out of the talks which he had in mind. He therefore proposed that the first sentence of paragraph 4 should read "I quite agree that at Chequers we all recognised that the suggestion of a coalition Government was not a practical proposition". The Prime Minister agreed to this amendment.

The Prime Minister said that at the moment feeling in the community, and indeed in the Cabinet, was running high as a result of the recent outrages and there was a feeling that the sort of talks the Home Secretary had in mind were in some ways irrelevant. The Home Secretary agreed that they were irrelevant in terms of the terrorist campaign, but he was convinced that they could well be relevant to the civil disobedience campaign and the general mood of the Catholic minority.

The Prime Minister enquired what the UK Government had in mind when reference was made in the 3rd paragraph of the original draft to "as soon as the security situation has sufficiently improved". The Home Secretary replied that this phrasing was to give him a free hand and he hoped that the announcement would be an incentive to the reasonable people in Northern Ireland to co-operate with the Northern Ireland Government.

As to when the announcement should be made, the Home Secretary recognised that there were difficulties about this, particularly in the light of Mr Lynch's visit on 6/7 September. He appreciated the difficulties for the Northern Ireland Government in the present climate in appearing to take on such commitments, but

SECRET

SECRET

he felt that it was important to have the text of the announcement agreed so that it could be used at an appropriate time. The Prime Minister said he would speak further about the timing after he had consulted his Cabinet again.

The Home Secretary then enquired about the suggestion that the Northern Ireland Government should publish a Green Paper on the subject of parliamentary and electoral reform. The Prime Minister explained that this would be a logical follow-up to the general hints he had made in this direction during the Queen's Speech Debate in June. At that time it had been announced that these matters would be the subject of a debate in Parliament as soon as the House resumed and the Green Paper would, by opening up these topics in greater detail, give guidance to the autumn debate. He assured the Home Secretary that the Green Paper would not commit the Government, nor indeed make any firm proposals, but would be tilted towards an advocacy of such initiatives. The Home Secretary accepted this, but said it was important that in advance of the talks he had in mind no firm proposals should be announced, for such an announcement would use up valuable shots in the Government's locker. It was agreed that Mr Woodfield should discuss the matter with Sir Harold Black in London today.

Discussion then centred on the last paragraph of the original Home Office draft, as amended by paragraph 6 of Mr Woodfield's Telex of 2 September. The Prime Minister suggested that the words "an active and permanent role, guaranteed by the United Kingdom Government" should be replaced by "an active permanent and guaranteed role". This amendment would help avoid an apparent undermining of the Northern Ireland Government and he pointed out that if, for example, the Northern Ireland Government's initiatives were to include some sort of Minority Advisory Council Northern Ireland legislation could include an obligation on the Government to consult such a body, and this arrangement would constitute a "guarantee". The Home Secretary accepted this argument and said that, additionally, the fact that the UK Government was convening the talks would be a clear indication of their role as guarantor. The Prime Minister's suggested amendment was therefore acceptable to the Home Secretary.

It was agreed that the Prime Minister should further consult his Cabinet on these matters and contact the Home Secretary again as soon as possible, preferably today.

Friday, 3 September. Further conversation between Home Secretary and the Prime Minister.

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SECRET

SECRET

The Prime Minister reported that his Cabinet colleagues were in agreement with the revised draft, provided that a further slight amendment be made in the last line: "administration" to be replaced by "public affairs". The Home Secretary agreed to this amendment.

As to the timing of the announcement, it was agreed that now that a mutually acceptable text had been established the announcement could be made when appropriate. It was hard to predict when that would be, since developments on the political front were as much a factor to be taken into account as the security situation on the ground. The Home Secretary would let the Prime Minister know before any announcement was made.

The Prime Minister then mentioned the Telex message on security matters which he had sent earlier in the day and which the Home Secretary had not yet seen. The Prime Minister emphasised his strength of feeling about the need to "localise" and increase the numbers of UDR as a matter of urgency. He sought the Home Secretary's support in expediting matters and the latter undertook to look into his suggestions at once.

SECRET