

E.P.
SECRET

Mr. M. C. Sullivan
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cc Lord Windlesham
Mr Channon
Mr Howell
Sir William Nield
Mr Woodfield
Mr Cairncross
Mr Howard-Drake
Permanent Secretaries (N Ireland)

A DEVOLUTIONARY SOLUTION

SECRETARY OF STATE:

1. Under the umbrella of the Future Policy Group, Northern Ireland Permanent Secretaries have been considering what contribution they might make, in the context of the forthcoming political discussions, to thinking about the future pattern of government in Northern Ireland.
2. There was general agreement that the choice would be between -

some form of devolution (that is to say, a solution retaining a real measure of executive and law-making powers for Northern Ireland institutions); and some form of integration (under which powers retained in Northern Ireland would be of nothing more than a local government character).
3. There was no unanimity amongst our number as to which would be the better choice and indeed we were all conscious that the ultimate choice will depend upon what the political interests of Northern Ireland are willing to work and the United Kingdom Parliament to enact. Accordingly, in submitting the attached Paper, we are not to be taken as positively recommending that the solution should be devolutionary but - as paragraph 1 points out - reviewing the possibilities of an approach which clearly commends a good deal of support from various interests. We hope to let you have some views on the integration approach in the fairly near future.
4. The attached Paper is the outcome of a number of meetings of the FPG. Even within the context of devolution, not all of our members supported in full each of these suggestions. Nevertheless, we felt it would be more helpful to you to submit the consensus outlines of a coherent scheme, whose different elements mesh together, than to produce a discursive review of various possible options.
5. As a body we would welcome very much an opportunity to discuss these problems with you.

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7 August 1972