

FUTURE POLICY GROUP

MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE HELD IN THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ROOM
AT STORMONT CASTLE AT 11 00 AM ON TUESDAY 16 JANUARY 1973.

PRESENT:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Sir William Nield, Permanent Under Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Sir David Holden, Central Secretariat
Sir Harold Black, Central Secretariat
Mr J T A Howard-Drake, Central Secretariat
Mr K P Bloomfield, Central Secretariat
Mr R H Kidd, Ministry of Finance
Mr K R Shimeld, Ministry of Finance
Mr M K Harris, Ministry of Home Affairs
Mr N Dugdale, Ministry of Health and Social Services
Mr P Shea, Ministry of Education
Mr J A Young, Ministry of Agriculture
Mr A C Brooke, Ministry of Commerce
Dr J A Oliver, Ministry of Development
Mr W Slinger, Ministry of Community Relations
Mr W A Leitch, First Parliamentary Draftsman
Mr F Steele, Special Adviser
Mr J B McAllister, Central Secretariat (Secretary)

CONSIDERATION OF PAPER ENTITLED "THE WHITE PAPER AND AFTER"

1. The Secretary of State said that the issues raised in the submitted Paper were most important and he welcomed the opportunity to discuss them with members of the Group.
2. The Secretary of State said that he was impressed with the arguments presented for publication of the White Paper as soon as possible after the result of the Border Poll had been declared and in particular agreed that this was the most satisfactory arrangement from the security point of view. He pointed out that pressure to publish the White Paper before the Poll would be exerted by:
 - (a) the Labour Party at Westminster and
 - (b) those who argued that a contributory cause to the continuing violence was uncertainty about the future.
3. The Secretary of State invited a general discussion on the arguments which could be deployed in reply to pressure of this kind during which the following points were noted:

- (a) While it was true that publication after the Border Poll was likely to minimise reaction within the majority community, this argument could not be publicly used as the Secretary of State could not appear to be swayed too much by one side or to be influenced by threats of violence.
- (b) Those who argued for publication before the Border Poll did so mainly on the grounds that the referendum would then take place in circumstances where the people of Northern Ireland knew the conditions involved in opting to remain within the United Kingdom. This could be countered by pointing out that the parameters for the future had been defined in the Green Paper and these parameters could be re-stated in the period leading up to the Poll. In addition the White Paper would not be a final and once-and-for-all statement about the future of Northern Ireland; it would be a further important step in a series of steps in the evolution of that solution.
- (c) Prior publication of a White Paper which provided for the continuation of Northern Ireland inside the United Kingdom could be said to conflict with the idea of a Poll designed to give the people of Northern Ireland an opportunity to say whether or not they wished to remain inside the United Kingdom. It was accepted that the force of this argument was reduced by the fact that no-one was in any doubt, even at this stage, as to the outcome of the Poll.
- (d) Violence did not arise so much from uncertainty as from the continuing activity of the IRA on the one hand and the extreme, sometimes criminal, elements on the other; the publication of the White Paper would not of itself alter this aspect of the security situation.
- (e) There was a distinction between what could be regarded as issues put to the people of Northern Ireland and what could be regarded as issues for the people of the United Kingdom. The Border Poll fell into the first category and the White Paper into the second. On the basis of this distinction there was a case for saying that the Poll should stand on its own and should not be used as a method of testing opinion on the White Paper.
- (f) There would be advantages in removing at least one area of uncertainty by making an announcement about the renewal of the Temporary Provisions Act; but it would almost certainly lead to pressure for a statement about the White Paper. On balance it would be better to make the announcement as soon as possible after the White Paper (and, if possible, the accompanying Bill) and to say that the Temporary Provisions Act was being renewed until such time as the new arrangements could be made effective.

- (g) The strongest argument which could be deployed in relation to the date of publication of the White Paper was that it was better to get the new arrangements right than to have them published by a particular date.
4. The following general points were also noted:
- (a) The administration would have to be seen as neutral in relation to the Poll and Government publicity should therefore be used to disseminate information about the arrangements for the Poll and to emphasise the arrangements, including postal voting facilities, which were being made for people to exercise their franchise.
- (b) Careful consideration would have to be given to the tone of any statement by the Secretary of State after the result of the Poll was announced. In particular, the task of emphasising the responsibilities of the people of Northern Ireland in opting for continued membership of the United Kingdom would be made easier if the United Kingdom Government were publicly to welcome the result. Consideration should be given to statements by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State and to the inclusion of an appropriate reference in the White Paper itself. Such statements could be important in reducing the impression that Northern Ireland was a burden on the United Kingdom reluctantly accepted but would have to be made in such a way as to avoid giving the appearance that the door to Irish unity had been permanently closed.
- (c) The effect on Protestant opinion of a large majority in the Poll for continued membership of the United Kingdom was uncertain. On the one hand, it could be argued that such a result would do much to defuse the potential for violence within that community and on the other hand, that it would harden majority opinion.
- (d) The Poll itself could be important in the context of international opinion provided it was properly conducted and there was a responsible involvement of the people of Northern Ireland in it. In these circumstances it was particularly important to ensure that adequate arrangements were made for appropriate involvement of the Press and other observers.
5. The Secretary of State agreed that the White Paper should deal in a practical way with matters which are of daily concern to working-class people in both communities in Northern Ireland and should carry a clear commitment to social and economic objectives. The question of whether the Paper should include a specific

commitment to parity, for example in the field of the cash social services, should be further considered. A Paper on whether some social services should in future be "reserved" had been considered by the Future Policy Group. This should be used as the basis for an early submission to the Secretary of State. The real concern of the people of Northern Ireland was with parity of results rather than detailed parity of methods. In any event, the White Paper should emphasise the idea of continuing co-operation between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and new Northern Ireland institutions in working towards agreed objectives. This would give the Secretary of State a positive part to play in Northern Ireland affairs and not merely a regulatory or restraining role.

6. The Secretary of State said that in considering a fall-back position in the event of devolutionary arrangements proving unworkable, it was important to remember that complete integration would reduce the opportunities for preferential or different treatment for Northern Ireland as compared with other regions of the United Kingdom.

7. The Secretary of State said that he was very conscious of the importance of including in the White Paper a re-statement of the pledge that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom unless the majority of its people decided otherwise. He also indicated that he was personally satisfied that in the new arrangements Northern Ireland should be given increased representation at Westminster. He pointed out that the precise number of Members in the United Kingdom Parliament to be given to Northern Ireland would certainly be a matter for further discussion. If, for example, Northern Ireland were to be given parity of representation with Scotland, the figure would be 20 while a comparison with England would give a figure of 16. It was agreed that arrangements to provide for increased representation could not begin before the Constitutional Bill had been enacted. Reference in the White Paper would therefore have to be restricted to a commitment to provide for the increased representation as soon as practicable. The problems of giving any sort of pledge that the increased representation would be effective "at the next election" were recognised.

8. Increased representation for Northern Ireland in the House of Lords was also considered. The Secretary of State said that it would be necessary for some existing peers to be prepared to play a larger part than at present. He would also consider a suggestion that Northern Ireland representation ought to be drawn from more classes of society and that this could be done by the creation of life peers from among, for example, professional men, business men and trade unionists.

9. The Secretary of State agreed that the elected representatives in Northern Ireland should be involved in working out arrangements for a Council of Ireland and that success was much more likely if the Dublin Government were prepared to accord formal recognition to Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. He pointed out however that such formal recognition would be difficult to obtain but that in any event participation by the Southern Government in the formal institutions of a Council of Ireland would involve a degree of recognition in itself. It was agreed that any attempt to rush the establishment of a Council of Ireland would greatly diminish the chances of succeeding. Every effort should be made in informal contacts, including contacts at official level, to impress upon the authorities in the South the importance of a proper response from the Government of the Irish Republic in ensuring the success of new arrangements. The Secretary of State said that there was a possibility that the continuation of a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in circumstances where new institutions were established in Northern Ireland could of itself lead to a different base for relationships between the Southern Government and the United Kingdom Government. In particular, the formal contacts which now took place between the authorities in the South and the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom would be more appropriately made with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

10. The Secretary of State agreed that the White Paper should not propose any particular form of Executive but should leave this for discussion with elected representatives after elections had been held for a new Assembly. He pointed out that the formation of an acceptable Executive was likely to be a major hurdle and said that consideration would have to be given to alternative courses in circumstances where a broadly based Executive could not be formed.

FURTHER MEETINGS

11. The Secretary of State said that he had found the discussion very valuable and that he would welcome a further discussion with the members of the Group as soon as possible. It was agreed that a further meeting would consider:

- (a) The Paper on the Bill of Rights,
- (b) The Paper on Security and Public Order,
- (c) The position of the Police,
- (d) If time permitted, the two remaining Papers which had been submitted to the Secretary of State on the Civil Service and Appointments and Employment in the Public Sector.