NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE SDLP ON 19 DECEMBER 1973

PRESENT:—

Secretary of State
Mr Cooper
Mr Allan
Mr McNeill

SDLP:
Mr Fitt
Mr Hume
Mr Devlin
Mr Duffy

The following points were discussed.

1. Detainees

The SDLP said that it was not clear from what the Secretary of State had said on television last night whether any releases would be made before Christmas. They felt that there had to be adequate movement of people out of detention and a formula to end detention, possibly with rehabilitation provisos, before they could sit on an Executive. The Provisional IRA had a vested interest in keeping detention going. To this end it was possible that up to 25% of those released may return to violence. However, the minority community would see that the Provisionals were nothing more than wreckers if detention ended and they continued with their campaign. The delegation asked if any of those who might be released would have to sign any declaration. They made the point that, although funds for the IRA were drying up in the USA, detention was the only issue that kept any money flowing. They said that Senator Kennedy and Mr O'Dwyer, the two most formidable personalities in Irish-American politics, were now completely in line with SDLP thinking though they still had reservations about detention. Mr Hume said that HMG should not fear a Protestant reaction since a senior member of the UVF had told him that they were not in a position to mount a violent campaign nor would the people in their areas support them. Some of the SDLP Assembly Members would like advance knowledge of releases so that they could get some of the credit.

The Secretary of State said that he was going ahead with releasing some detainees even though there was considerable feeling in the rest of the UK especially after yesterday's bombs in London. Mr Cooper pointed out that the end of detention could be in sight. If there was a positive response to the releases that would take place there could be further releases. The Secretary of State said that none of those released would be asked to sign any declaration.
In response to a question, Mr Cooper said he would look at the case for paying compensation to those released and to the possibility of wives of detainees being able to claim supplementary benefit grants to cover the cost of clothing for the detainees and travel to visit them in Maze Prison.

2. Rent and Rates Strike

The delegation thought that the Party should be able to make an announcement on the rent and rates strike about Friday or Saturday of this week. They were concerned about possible cases of hardship and that arrangements for re-paying arrears would be as flexible as possible. They wanted more detailed information on an area basis of the numbers on rent and rates strike. Mr Cooper said that more detailed information would be sought. He said that if the SDLP were to make a helpful statement at the weekend then HMG could respond by making helpful arrangements for the re-paying of arrears.

D G McNeill
Private Secretary
20 December 1973

Copies to:-
Mr van Straubenzee
Mr Howell
Mr Mills
Lord Belstead
Mr Cooper
Sir David Holden
Mr Woodfield
Sir Harold Black
Mr Smith
Mr Bloomfield
Mr Howard-Drake
Mr D Payne
Mr D Howe
Mr Trevelyan
Mr J Allan
Mr Jordan
Mr Goddard
Mr Marsh
Mr D G Allen
Mr J Lawrence
Mr Williams
Mr Roberts
Mr Stevens (2)