

(16)
 Mr Blayfield
 Dr Hayes
 Mr Hanley
 To meet 11.10 2/75

PIRA CEASEFIRE

Note of a meeting held at 11.10 am on Tuesday, 18 February 1975, in Stormont Castle

Present : Secretary of State Mr Oliver Napier
 Mr D Gilliland Mr Denis Loretto
 Mr K J Jordan Mr Bob Cooper
 Mr Basil Glass

The purpose of the meeting, which had been arranged at the request of the Alliance Party, was to enable the Secretary of State to explain the current Northern Ireland political and security situation and to learn the Alliance Party's views.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

2. The Secretary of State explained the current situation as he saw it. The Feakle clergymen's meeting with the PIRA before Christmas had been fortunately timed, since it had coincided with the Provisional Army Council's own desire to have a temporary ceasefire. The subsequent talks between NIO officials and Provisional Sinn Fein had been limited to painstaking and repeated explanations of the Government's policy which had been spelt out fully in three recent Statements to the House. Officials had not engaged in any discussions about the political future of Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State's Statement on 14 January had not been a hasty response to the PIRA ceasefire; on the contrary, it had represented the outcome of a lengthy consideration of Government policy. A genuine and sustained cessation of violence would cover more than the simple absence of bombings and shootings; it would have to embrace the complete cessation of the movement of arms and explosives and the ending of kneecappings and kangaroo courts. If there were a genuine and sustained cessation of violence, there would be a new lower profile role for the Army. In those circumstances, it was to be hoped that more and more members of the Republican Movement would turn towards political action to secure their goals.

INCIDENT CENTRES

3. The Secretary of State discussed the thinking behind the Incident Centres. The Government had wished to avoid being placed in a totally false situation by PIRA allegations of incidents by the Security Forces which could lead to, or (as had happened in January) be used as a pretext for a breakdown of any ceasefire. The de-centralised system of Incident Centres which consisted of nothing more than a telephone which was manned for 24 hours a day, was a two-way communication system to permit the investigation of alleged violations of the ceasefire. It had been decided to staff the centres with civil servants rather than members of the Security

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Forces, so as not to appear to give the Provisionals equality of status with the Army. They were not designed to give the Provisionals any special political status, although it was foolish to think that any organisation which managed to hold down 15,000 troops lacked credibility or substance.

4. Mr Napier said that the Alliance Party were disturbed about the Incident Centres because -

- (a) they were giving Provisional Sinn Fein a unique political status;
- (b) the restriction of knowledge of the telephone numbers to Provisional Sinn Fein was forcing non-members to approach that organisation for the redress of grievances; and
- (c) they were likely to lead to the establishment of Provisional vigilantes in catholic areas.

5. When elaborating these views, members of the delegation made the following points:

- (a) Although the Incident Centres were a Sinn Fein monopoly, some 90% of the incidents likely to put the ceasefire at risk would arise from other sources.
- (b) The only way in which members of the public could get rapid satisfaction about security incidents would be by contacting Sinn Fein. This would damage the position of all elected representatives - Assemblymen and Councillors alike. People would no longer think it would be worth while attending politicians' advice centres.
- (c) The telephone numbers of the Incident Centres should be issued to all elected representatives.
- (d) If the status of Provisional Sinn Fein were enhanced in that way, it would tend to become a more acceptable organisation in the eyes of ordinary Catholics. If the ceasefire then ended, there would be a much greater reservoir of support for the Provisionals, and the task of the Security Forces would have been made incomparably more difficult. It had taken many deaths to create the present climate of Catholic disillusionment with the Provisionals; it would be a great pity to throw that advantage away through careless handling of the Incident Centre concept.
- (e) If vigilante groups did begin to police Catholic areas, the Government should take any steps (whatever the cost) to stop them.

6. The Secretary of State took careful note of the points made about the danger of the Incident Centres appearing to undermine the ready and special access which Members of the Assembly continued to enjoy to Northern Ireland Ministers through Stormont Castle. In

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order to help the politicians, the Secretary of State undertook to issue a Press Notice which would draw attention to the ready availability of Northern Ireland Office Ministers.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

7. The Secretary of State outlined some of his ideas about the running of the Convention, although he made it clear that final decisions on procedure would rest with the Members of the Convention themselves. The Secretary of State said that he had decided who should be Chairman some months ago. He would announce the name at the appropriate time. He hoped that Northern Ireland politicians would now begin to think seriously about the Convention. There were many issues to consider - eg how to ensure that the early discussions did not become limited to inflexible statements of position; how to handle public relations to prevent rumours but not to have an unhelpful glare of publicity which would encourage posturing; the role and nature of sub-committees. The Party leaders might wish to have an early discussion, shortly after the name of the Chairman had been announced.



K J JORDAN
19 February 1975

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