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NORTHERN IRELAND QUARTERLY ASSESSMENT: 1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 1986

A. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Political activity in Northern Ireland has continued to be dominated by unionist opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
2. On 16 April the Prime Minister wrote to Messrs Paisley and Molyneux offering discussions about a framework within which dialogue could take place - the so-called talks about talks. The two leaders immediately welcomed the proposal for a preliminary exchange, but emphasised that substantive talks could not take place if the Agreement was still being implemented; the aim of the substantive talks would be "to find an alternative to and a replacement for" the Agreement. Mr Paisley and Mr Robinson later emphasised that this stance did not represent any change in policy. The Agreement had to go if discussions likely to lead to real political progress were to take place. Paisley made it clear that simple abolition of the Agreement and a return to direct rule was no longer an option.
3. Subsequently the two unionist leaders called off talks planned with senior Northern Ireland Office officials on 13 May with the excuse that the Secretary of State had given a categorical assurance that the Agreement would not be suspended and that they therefore saw no purpose in opening discussions.
4. Although there have been some indications of frustration in some unionist circles, particularly within the UUP, at the lack of political progress there has been no subsequent sign of any willingness to enter negotiations with the Government.

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5. Political debate within the unionist camp has centred on the devolution/integration issue, with advocates of the latter, led by Mr Robert McCartney under the banner of the Campaign for Equal Citizenship, gaining some ground. The DUP remain firmly wedded to devolution, which is also supported by many within the UUP. These include a significant number of prominent members of the party, some of whom are on the Central Policy Committee, and the Northern Ireland Charter Group, one of whose leaders is Harry West, a former UUP leader.

The Northern Ireland Assembly

6. UUP and DUP Assemblymen continued to meet at Parliament Buildings weekly to attack the Anglo-Irish Agreement, creating little stir but providing some momentum to the campaign against the Agreement. It became clear that the Government was losing patience and the considerable speculation about the Assembly's future was brought to an end when the House of Commons approved an Order on 19 June dissolving it. There was general public understanding that the continued refusal by the Unionist parties to carry out the Assembly's proper functions made this inevitable.

7. Threats to occupy the Assembly Chamber were carried out following the formal notification to the Speaker of the Assembly's dissolution after a Privy Council meeting on 23 June. Eighteen DUP and two UUP Assembly Members remained in the Chamber after the Speaker and other Members had left. Long speeches about the Anglo-Irish Agreement continued until 2.00 am the following day when, at the request of the Assembly Clerk, the RUC moved in to eject them. Amid scuffles with protesters, the last to emerge were Mr Paisley and Mr Robinson who were carried out by the RUC. The DUP action was in sharp contrast to the more dignified departure from the building of the UUP members who whilst no less angry chose not to try to exploit the occasion for propaganda purposes.

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8. In order to continue their propaganda initiative, some, predominantly DUP, former Assembly members are continuing to meet as a body in the Council Chamber of Belfast City Hall. Their predictable debates have not excited great interest.

Belfast City Council

9. The High Court imposed a £25,000 fine on Belfast City Council on 30 April suspended for one week to allow the council time to obey an earlier High Court ruling to resume normal business. At a meeting on 30 April the Council agreed to continue its adjournment policy, but this decision was reversed at a further meeting on 6 May when five UUP Councillors including Mr John Carson the then Lord Mayor, voted against their fellow unionists. The five 'dissidents' became the target of much fierce criticism from their colleagues. Though their opposition to the Agreement remained undiminished, they disliked being in breach of the law.

10. Councillor Sammy Wilson, a 33 year old former schoolmaster, became the City's first DUP Lord Mayor at a stormy Council meeting in the City Hall on 2 June. In his acceptance speech Alderman Wilson said he would do his best to rid Belfast of 'two terrible cancers' - Sinn Fein and the Anglo-Irish Agreement and made it clear he would use his position for party political purposes.

Party Conferences

11. The UUP, DUP and Alliance Party all held their annual conferences during the period. All were essentially predictable.

12. At the UUP Conference, despite earlier speculation about his future, Jim Molyneaux was unanimously reelected leader and the party reaffirmed its wholehearted opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

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13. Although there was greater evidence at the DUP Conference than in the past of differences of opinion within the party, most noticeably on the question of support for the RUC, Mr Paisley had no difficulty in rallying his supporters and consolidating his own position as leader. In his speech he condemned attacks on the police, but in discussing a motion of no confidence in the Chief Constable (which was, of course, carried,) he warned that his party's continued support for them depended on them no longer being used to implement the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

14. At their Conference, the Alliance Party reaffirmed their qualified support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement and their commitment to devolution. Unionists in general and the DUP in particular - the party with 'the ballot paper in one hand and the cudgel in the other' - came in for strong criticism.

Churches

15. At the Church of Ireland General Synod in Dublin on 20 May Archbishop Eames said that it was not sufficient constantly to say no to a political initiative like the Agreement and urged the introduction of a sense of reality on both sides of the argument. 'The people of Northern Ireland as a whole deserve much better than they are experiencing at present'. This statement, whilst helpful, was also an attempt to reconcile the divergent views on the Agreement of members of the Church of Ireland in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

16. On 4 June the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland meeting in Belfast held a restrained debate on the Agreement, registering their unease and disquiet but overwhelmingly urging the unionist politicians to reopen discussions with the Government.

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B. ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Anglo-Irish Agreement

17. During the period, the Intergovernmental Conference met twice. The first meeting was in London on 9 May. The Northern Ireland Secretary was accompanied by Sir Michael Havers, Sir Patrick Mayhew and Mr Nicholas Scott; Mr Barry by Mr Alan Dukes, the Irish Justice Minister, and Mr John Rogers, the Irish Attorney-General. There were reports to the Conference on the progress made by working groups on extradition and public confidence in the administration of justice. The Conference also discussed cross-border economic co-operation in several fields, notably tourism. The Irish expressed concern about pollution from Sellafield.

18. The meeting on 17 June in Belfast was attended by Mr King and Mr Scott, on the British side, and by Mr Barry and Mr Dukes for the Irish. The Chief Constable and the Garda Commissioner also attended. A Joint report by the two Forces on exchange of information and liaison structures - that is, intelligence co-operation with the South - was considered : full and rapid implementation by the Irish will represent a considerable advance. HMG announced their intention to move in several fields of common concern. On the question of "I" voters - a category of voters who may vote in Parliamentary and European Elections, but not in elections to district councils or the Assembly, and many of whom are Irish citizens - the Government said it would take steps to abolish this distinction. (This will probably be done this year in respect of the Assembly, by subordinate legislation; changing the position in respect of local government, which needs a Bill, will take longer.) The Government also indicated a number of areas for possible future development in its recognition of the position of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. It agreed too, to explore further improvement

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of the road between Newry and Dundalk: this is the central section of the Belfast to Dublin Road, and the Irish attach particular importance to improving it.

Other Ministerial Meetings

19. There were also a number of meetings between UK and Republic of Ireland Ministers during the period, outside the Conference. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach in the margins of the European Council: and Sir Geoffrey Howe met Mr Barry similarly. Mr Scott visited Mr Dukes, his Irish counterpart, to discuss a wide range of law and order matters; and Mr Needham visited Mr John Boland, the Irish Minister for the Environment. There were also other less formal encounters.

Divorce Referendum

20. The referendum in the Republic on 26 June on the constitutional amendment to permit limited civil divorce yielded a two-to-one majority against - rather more than the supporters of the measure had resigned themselves to on the eve of the poll, and a marked contrast to opinion poll evidence at the start of the campaign of a large majority in favour. The result may well have had more to do with the superior tactics of the opponents of divorce, Fianna Fail's exploitation of the campaign as a means of inflicting harm on the Government, and considerations among rural voters of the effects of divorce on property rights, than with the influence of the Catholic Church. But it was seized on with enthusiasm by Unionist opponents of the Agreement as evidence of the priest-ridden nature of Southern society, and as a mortal blow to the Agreement. HMG has rebutted the last point, but otherwise largely refrained from comment. The Taoiseach made clear immediately after the result that he would not resign, and Fine Gael has largely closed ranks around him; but the long-term effect on his political standing is unclear at present.

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International Fund

21. On 2 July President Reagan signed the Bill making available \$50million for the International Fund for Ireland in the US Financial Year 1986. The money will be available shortly. It will be paid not under the Bill authorising the US payments to the International Fund, but under their equivalent of our Supplementary Estimates; the original International Fund Bill will, however, continue its progress through Congress, and is expected to be enacted before the end of the 1986 Session. Unlike the original Bill, the Appropriations Bill sets no conditions on the use of the money though they may be imposed later by the State Department. No figure has yet been put on payments in future years. An arrangement with the Irish as to the disbursement of the Fund should be reached shortly.

UK/US Supplementary Extradition Treaty

22. The United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 15 to 2 on 12 June 1986 in favour of a Supplementary Treaty. If the Treaty survives a vote in the full Senate (where a two-thirds majority is required), it will then go to the President for signature, probably at the beginning of August. Under the Treaty, those accused or convicted of a wide range of offences will no longer be able to avoid extradition by claiming that their crimes were politically motivated. The present revision contains amendments to the original text, notably the introduction of a so-called "humanitarian safeguard", but these are acceptable to HMG and leave intact the Treaty's fundamental purpose.

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23. On 1 July the Netherlands Supreme Court ruled that the McFarlane and Kelly extradition cases, which had earlier been decided in the Amsterdam District Court, should be re-heard. At the time of writing an English text of the judgement was not available but it is good news that the Supreme Court may be taking the view that the District Court's interpretation of the political offence exception was too broad. If this turns out to be so, there is a chance that McFarlane and Kelly will be extradited to stand trial for offences allegedly committed during the 1983 Maze escape, and to complete their original sentences.

C. SECURITY

24. In the second quarter of 1986 six members of the security forces and nine civilians (including one terrorist) died as a result of the security situation, bring the total for the half-year to twenty-seven. This was ten fewer than for the same period last year. The security forces have continued to be the principal target of the terrorists, who have also committed a number of punishment attacks against alleged informers and others. Attacks and threats against building and other contractors whom the Provisionals have claimed to be working for the security forces have also continued. Public disorder associated with Loyalist protests has continued since the beginning of the year. When the Anglo-Irish Conference met on 17 June, the occasion was marked by mainly peaceful - and smaller - demonstrations across the Province. On 23 June, the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly was accompanied by a demonstration outside Parliament Buildings when about 200 protestors attacked the police with stones. Twenty-one policemen received minor injuries. As already mentioned, the 20 Assembly Members who occupied the main chamber of Parliament Buildings had to be forcibly removed by the police.

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25. During June there were numerous Loyalist parades throughout Northern Ireland. The vast majority passed off peacefully, and trouble at the remainder was relatively minor.

26. In the debate on the renewal of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 on 19 June the Secretary of State announced the Government's intention to introduce measures to prevent paramilitary exploitation of the private security industry in Northern Ireland, and provisions governing the rights while in police custody of suspects detained under emergency legislation. He also made a strong appeal for parade organisers to think seriously about the implications of their proposals before seeking to arrange provocative marches in sensitive areas.

D. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

27. The Harland and Wolff-led consortium won the Ministry of Defence Order for the first of a class of Auxillary Oiler Replenishment vessels and this means there will be some work in the yard until 1989/90. However, despite the fall in oil prices and energy costs the industrial and employment outlook in Northern Ireland is very serious. Rothmans announced their withdrawal from Northern Ireland with the loss of over 800 jobs at Carrickfergus. At its peak Rothmans employed over 1,500 people; they are now to concentrate on factories in England.

28. A number of reports from Government sources and independent bodies recently have all pointed to the same stark picture - rising unemployment (up to 25% overall by the end of the decade) and a distinct lack of confidence within the business community. The outlook is for static labour demand but an increased labour

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population. A sharp decline in net outward migration and the absence of any significant new inward investment in the foreseeable future sharpen the difficulties. Since 1979 30% of jobs in the manufacturing sector have been lost; 80% of remaining manufacturing employment is in companies either assisted by the Industrial Development Board or in public ownership (Harland and Wolff and Shorts). Many of these companies are in traditional, declining, or vulnerable industries.

29. In the rural areas agriculture is also experiencing difficult times. Last year's exceptionally severe weather and the current interference in the lamb market as a result of increased radiation levels have added to the underlying structural problems of over-production and the CAP.

30. The reform of the Social Security System will apply to Northern Ireland on a parity basis. Whilst it is still not entirely clear what the gains and losses will be for individuals and households in the various categories it seems likely that Northern Ireland as a region will lose a significant sum given its greater dependence on social security and in particular the high incidence of single payments (which are to be replaced).

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

11 July 1986

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