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cc. M. Spence
3523/7

ME/172/87/SH



PS/SofS (L&B) - Mufax

- cc PS/PUS (L&B) - M
- 1. Sir K Bloomfield
- Mr Stephens
- Mr Burns - M
- Mr Chesterton - M
- Mr Innes
- Mr Bell - M
- Mr Blackwell
- Mr Kirk - M
- Mr S Hewitt
- Mr J McConnell
- Mr G Hewitt

22/7

2. see 3

MEASURES AGAINST SINN FEIN

I should record that, as I mentioned to you on the telephone this morning, Mr Lillis has been pressing me for clarification as to what lay behind recent media speculation about the imminence of Government action against Sinn Fein representation on local councils in Northern Ireland. The Irish have noticed in particular the coverage of the Secretary of State's remarks to the Press on 21 July.

2. I have told Mr Lillis that I am confident that no announcement of Government policy is imminent. Given the approach of the holiday season, I said that I thought it was extremely unlikely that any announcement would be made before the end of August at the earliest. I reminded Mr Lillis of the background to this matter, including the consultations with local political opinion carried out by Mr Needham during the winter of 1985/86, and the informal conversations which we had had in the Secretariat from time to time during which we had said that the most likely course of action would be the publication of a consultative paper, given that only in exceptional circumstances did we seek to legislate without an initial period for consultation beforehand. If any announcement was to be made after the summer break - and I emphasised that I was not aware that any decision had yet been firmly taken to make such an announcement - then I assumed that it would take the form of an

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL
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announcement of options for consideration and for consultation with the interested parties. I could not say what the options for action might be, but there was plenty of press speculation on which Mr Lillis could draw. I added that any period of consultation would of course enable the Irish Government to give us their views, but that I was confident that we would inform them in advance (although not necessarily very much in advance) of any planned announcement.

3. Mr Lillis appeared generally content with this. But it is clear that he and his successors will continue to take a close interest in this subject. He took the opportunity of reminding me that the nationalist community would tend to oppose anything which seemed to inhibit the electoral rights of nationalists in general, and that they would particularly resent any Government action which seemed to discriminate against any nationalist grouping without imposing similar restrictions on extreme loyalist organisations. I said that we were well aware of the importance at least of this last point.

Mark Elliott

M ELLIOTT
22 July 1987

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