

TOP SECRET

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Prime Minister entertained Captain O'Neill, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, to lunch at No. 10 Downing Street on Friday, August 5, 1966. The Home Secretary, Mr. Harold Black, Secretary of the Northern Ireland Cabinet, and I were also present.

There was a brief discussion of the economic situation during which Captain O'Neill said that the Northern Irish economy could probably survive a relatively short period of restriction in the United Kingdom without too much difficulty, but that restrictions which extended over a longer period - say significantly longer than six months - could well have a most damaging impact. The Prime Minister said that the Government's measures had been consciously biased in favour of the less economically well-off parts of the United Kingdom and he would hope that the diversification of the Ulster economy which had taken place in recent years might afford them some protection.

The main discussion, however, was concerned with the political situation in Northern Ireland and the effect this had on relations with the United Kingdom. Captain O'Neill explained that the latent politico-religious feelings in Northern Ireland were still very strong particularly among the poorer members of the community. His Government had made considerable progress towards greater internal tolerance and better relations with the

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Irish Republic during the past three years, but this progress itself, plus the passionate celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rebellion, had led to a "back lash" of ultra Protestant feeling.

The main manifestation of this was the movement which had grown up about the Reverend Ian Paisley. Matters had now reached a dangerous point and he thought no other course was now open to him but to call a halt to progress for a period of six months or so. Any early movement towards reconciliation either internally or with the Republic would endanger him politically and could lead to his replacement by a more intransigent figure, or even to a return to a "1912" situation.

The Paisley movement and the events which had led to it had "blown him off course" and he could only get back on the course after ^{leaving} ~~a~~ long time for passions to cool.

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary expressed understanding of the position in which Captain O'Neill found himself but nevertheless explored various lines along which further progress might be achieved. Ideas canvassed included an inquiry into the operation of the franchise for Northern Ireland seats in the Parliament ~~of~~ Westminster (on which Captain O'Neill said that there were faults on both sides which probably balanced out in the event); a revision of the franchise for Stormont and in local elections (which Captain O'Neill said were highly explosive issues which moreover probably had little or no impact on the allocation of seats in these bodies. Indeed the end product might worsen the situation by,

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for example, removing the two liberal Catholics who sat for ^{University} Ulster seats in Stormont and increasing rather than diminishing Protestant representation in and around Belfast); and the introduction of an "Ombudsman" for Northern Ireland (which Captain O'Neill said would inflame rather than quieten the situation without producing any impact on ^{the} basic attitudes which were at the root of the problem). It was, however, suggested and agreed that there would be advantage in Captain O'Neill addressing a private meeting of members of the Westminster Parliament, many of whose attitudes on Northern Ireland's affairs were based on out-of-date information. Care would have to be taken about such a meeting, however, to ensure that reports of it were not counter-productive in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister for his part undertook to do his best to restrain those numerous members of the House of Commons who felt that action should be taken to end discrimination in Northern Ireland. He emphasized however that while he might succeed in doing this for a time he could not, nor would he seek to, restrain these Members throughout the whole of the present Parliament. Progress must be made if the position was to be held. Captain O'Neill ended by regretting that it had not been possible for Her Majesty the Queen to make some suitable remarks during her recent visit to Northern Ireland approving the progress which had been made in recent years. The Queen had a very special place in the lives of Ulster Protestants and an open expression of her support for religious tolerance and for ^{non-}discrimination could have a major impact.

The Prime Minister and Capt O'Neill agreed
 (to meet again later in the year to continue their discussion.)