

SECRET

PRIME MINISTER

In your personal minute number 13/66 you asked for a note on the preparations being made to meet the threat of I.R.A. violence over the Easter period, when the 50th anniversary of the 1916 rising will be celebrated.

Information received both from Scotland Yard and the Northern Ireland Government shows that the threat is a real one. During the last year or so there has been a steady build up of membership of the I.R.A., and it was estimated at the end of last year that there were some 3,000 trained members or supporters who could be called out in an emergency. Military training has been carried out at camps held secretly in various places in Ireland, and an adequate supply of arms and ammunition is held. Recent speeches and other public statements made by leaders of the I.R.A. have included

passages advocating the use of force. The programme of action which has been adopted includes the kidnapping and assassination of Northern Ireland Ministers and senior officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and of the Services, attacks on such places as banks to obtain funds, cross-border guerilla attacks against selected targets in Northern Ireland and sabotage of military and industrial installations.

As part of the 50th anniversary celebrations processions and meetings, attended by many people from the Republic, will be held in Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Government fear that attempts will be made to foment sectarian troubles, necessitating the intervention of the police, and that the I.R.A. campaign will then be publicised as a people's uprising against the excesses of the Crown forces. The week-end following Easter, 16th/17th April, is regarded as an acute danger period.

In Northern Ireland police protection has been given to Ministers; border stations have been strengthened; arrangements have been made for the

training of special constables (and some have been mobilized); and scoutcars, some additional firearms and ammunition have been supplied to the Royal Ulster Constabulary by the Army. There is close liaison between the Northern Ireland Government and the G.O.C.-in-C., Northern Ireland, and the latter has been made responsible for the co-ordination of the internal security arrangements of all three Services within his Command. Plans have also been made for the military support of the police, if needed. In addition the Ministry of Defence have reviewed the plan for reinforcing the present garrison (which consists of an infantry battalion and an armoured regiment equipped with armoured cars), if reinforcement should become necessary. The VCGS has just returned from a visit to Northern Ireland during which he discussed with the Authorities there whether they considered our Service arrangements for their support fully met their needs. He reports that the Minister for Home Affairs and the Inspector General both expressed their appreciation of the promptness with

which the Army had met their request for armoured cars, arms and ammunition; and that they were entirely satisfied with the arrangements in force for close co-operation between the Administration, the R.U.C. and the Services in the event of trouble. They were however particularly concerned about the weekend after Easter (16/17 April) and the period thereafter and arrangements are therefore being made by the Ministry of Defence to send an additional infantry battalion, ostensibly for training. We hope that this move will not attract undue publicity, especially as it is most important to avoid any accusation that by deciding to move troops to Northern Ireland we have provoked incidents that might otherwise not have occurred.

Special Branch of New Scotland Yard are keeping a watch on developments in this country and working in close contact with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. A special system has been set up in the Ministry of Defence whereby reports of incidents and information about likely targets in the United Kingdom may be

rapidly received and notified to all concerned. Information received by the Special Branch so far suggests that there is a danger that I.R.A. agents may attempt to sabotage public or military installations in this country, or to procure arms and ammunition from factories or Service armouries. All Chief Constables and Service Commands in this country have been warned of the threat and the Service authorities have recently reviewed their security arrangements.

There are two bright spots to this gloomy picture. Despite the fact that the threat became evident some months ago there has so far been no serious outbreak of violence. The election period, unlike the last, has passed off quietly in Northern Ireland. The firm action known to have been taken by the Northern Ireland Government may act as a deterrent. Secondly, there is growing evidence of the Republican Government's desire to take a firm stand against I.R.A. lawlessness and to co-operate with the Northern Ireland authorities.

I think that the arrangements set out in this minute are the most sensible that can be made to cover the threat, but I should of course be glad to circulate a paper to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee. I shall in any case be keeping the matter under close review, and shall report any fresh developments to you.

I am copying this minute to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Minister of Defence for the Army and Sir Burke Trend.

RK?

K 4th April 1966