

SECRET

Prime Minister to see

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Northern Ireland

HOME OFFICE

WHITEHALL, S.W.1



22nd November, 1968

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Dear Peter,

Northern Ireland

I send you the draft of the statement to be made to-day by the Northern Ireland Government, depending on the outcome of a meeting of Unionist Party members at Stormont which is now in progress. Also attached is a draft which we have prepared of the unattributable guidance which it is suggested we should use when asked by the press for H.M. Government's reaction. The general lines of this guidance were approved by the Home Secretary last night, (who had spoken to Captain O'Neill on the telephone), and he will see the actual text as soon as he returns from this morning's Cabinet.

*Yours sincerely,
Brian Cubben*

Peter Gregson, Esq.

*cc. Mr. Lloyd George.*Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Government is likely to announce to-day the measures described in the attached note. If, but only if, we are asked for our reaction, unattributable guidance should be on the following lines.

The Government welcome the measures announced by the Northern Ireland Government, and particularly the decisions to apply equitable standards in housing allocation by local authorities, the measures for the redress of grievances including the appointment of a Parliamentary Commissioner, and the decision to give early effect to the Londonderry plan. These are encouraging steps on the way forward. It is the Government's hope that the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland will take urgent action to give these reforms effect and that they may be carried out in an atmosphere of tranquillity in the Province. Housing allocation, Parliamentary Commissioner, the termination of powers under the Special Powers Acts, as well as the reform of the local government franchise were among the matters discussed at the meeting on 4th November between the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, and the Ministers of Commerce and Home Affairs. No doubt there will be a further meeting.

Without minimising the value of the measures announced, it has to be observed that the statement, beyond mentioning the abolition of the company vote, a welcome development, holds out no certain intention of giving all adults the local government vote in the near future. In the Government's view, establishment of one man one vote in local authority elections is an essential element of true progress.

General Tone

It is important to avoid the impression that our reaction was ready in advance; there should be some pause before it is available. The general tone should be that the measures are welcome as far as they go, but are essentially something 'on account'. Questions on action by the Government should be dealt with by reference to the likelihood of a further meeting with Captain O'Neill, ~~early, but probably not this year.~~
at a convenient time.

Home Office
Whitehall

cc. Sir Lloyd Hughes

Statement by the Northern Ireland Government

(1) Allocation of Houses: Of some 10,000 allocations of houses made annually by public authorities only a few are contested as unfair. Nevertheless, as the Prime Minister said at the Housing Conference on 30th October 1968, all housing authorities must be seen to place need in the forefront in procedures for the allocation of houses. Accordingly, the Ministry of Development will be issuing in the near future a circular to local authorities emphasising that housing allocation should be placed on the basis of a readily understood and published scheme. Councils will be asked to submit schemes to the Ministry within a limited period and will be given guidance on the formulation of such a scheme. This will be on the basis of what is known as the "Group plus Points" system.

(2) Investigation of Citizens' Grievances: Consideration will be given to the need for effective machinery to investigate such grievances in an objective way and in the area of central government activities there will be legislation to appoint a Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration ("Ombudsman").

(3) Implementation of Londonderry Area Plan: As already announced, the Government is determined to ensure that prompt and effective action is taken to implement a plan, welcomed by all shades of opinion, which could transform the economic and social conditions of life in the city. If necessary, this will be accomplished by the appointment of a strong, well qualified and objective statutory commission with full powers to carry out all the necessary work of planning, co-ordination and physical development.

(4) The Local Government Franchise: We are concerned at the widespread misunderstanding and confusion which exists on this issue. It is not generally appreciated that in any event the main triennial local government elections will not be held again until April 1970.

It is our intention that a comprehensive reform and modernisation of the local government structure should be brought into effect within a period of three years - that is, by the end of 1971. As already announced, once the Government has arrived at its decisions on the basis for this re-structuring, consideration can be given to a review of the franchise in the context of the organisation, financing and structure of the new local government objectives. Meanwhile, whatever developments emerge, it is accepted that the company vote has no longer a place in local government and accordingly it will be abolished at an early date.

(5) Special Powers: Discussions have been held with the Westminster Government in the light of the United Kingdom international obligations. It has been accepted by the Government of Northern Ireland that, while it must retain its freedom to deal in appropriate ways with subversive trends to the constitution and security of the Province, the United Kingdom Government should be put in a position, whenever possible, to comply fully and without a qualification with its international obligations. Accordingly it has been agreed that:

(1) As soon as the Northern Ireland Government consider this can be done without undue hazard, such special powers as are in conflict with international obligations, will, as in the past, be withdrawn from current use.

(ii) In the event of the Northern Ireland Government considering it essential to re-activate such powers, the United Kingdom Government will enter the necessary derogation.

Home Office
Whitehall
22nd November 1968