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Mr North

T. Cairncross 12.

S. of S.Northern Ireland: Political Intelligence

Following Friday's Cabinet meeting, we have been considering how to handle the requirement to set up a service to provide current political intelligence. This must consist not only of, say, weekly situation reports, which, given the resources, are fairly easily produced, but also background information on political and social questions, which is less easy to produce if only because some questions do not admit of a dogmatic answer. I believe we can best tackle both these tasks in the office, if we can increase our staff. I have obtained the agreement of the Civil Service Department to an additional post of Assistant Secretary, and am setting up a division, within the General Department, and reporting to Mr. Cairncross, to deal exclusively with Northern Ireland. This will be headed by Mr. North and consist of three sections - one to deal with the new intelligence commitment; one to look after contingency planning and deal with current operational questions; the third to deal with the not inconsiderable day-to-day work that has always arisen in connexion with Northern Ireland, e.g. on agricultural questions. Each section will be headed by a Principal. I would then, by rearrangement, add some duties to the division which formerly included Northern Ireland affairs in its province and which will continue to deal with the Islands. This will be a welcome relief to some strains elsewhere in the office.

... You were asked to report back to Cabinet and I attach a draft memorandum. The first weekly report is now being prepared.

You should know that Sir Burke Trend suggested that we might meet the new commitment by augmenting the Ulster Working Group under the JIC. I do not think this would be satisfactory and I think that Sir Burke is now content with the alternative arrangements I propose. Inter-departmental machinery can generate its own problems and it is better to consult open sources on open intelligence separately from consulting secret sources on secret intelligence. For the open

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intelligence, we shall try to spread our net as wide as we can, no doubt expanding as we gain experience. This is not to say that there will not be co-ordination of open and secret intelligence. The intention is that the open weekly summary for the Cabinet should go also to the Ulster Working Group as a background for their secret intelligence assessment.

For a number of years there has been a Northern Ireland Liaison Officer in the Home Office seconded from the Northern Ireland Cabinet Office. He has spent part of his time with the Ulster Office. The post of Liaison Officer has just changed hands; we would hope to make full use of him for background information for our new intelligence commitment; but our political communications will still be direct with Mr. Black.

P. A.

12th May, 1969

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CABINET

Northern Ireland

Information on Political and Social Questions

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department

At the meeting on 7th May (CC(69) 21st Conclusions, Minute 2) I was invited to consider measures that might be taken within my Department to provide an intelligence appreciation, including a political and social analysis of the situation in Northern Ireland.

2. It was suggested that if we were to post a high commissioner or, at a lower level, a liaison officer in Belfast, we should be supplied with the kind of information we received as a matter of course from our posts overseas. I indicated on 7th May that I saw disadvantages in this course, and on further reflection I still feel that the same result can better be met by other means. If an officer were posted to this particular part of the United Kingdom, I cannot help thinking that we should lose many of the advantages of the very close liaison on Government business between the Home Office and the Northern Ireland Cabinet Office, and would create suspicions in the minds of the Northern Ireland Government.

3. I prefer to develop the existing sources in the Home Office. We already possess, or can bring to bear, sources of information which should provide us collectively with the information we need as a background to our decisions; and I have arranged for the immediate establishment of a new Division to deal exclusively with Northern Ireland affairs, including current intelligence requirements.

4. With these resources it will be my object to circulate fairly frequent summaries of political information; the first summary will come out this week. Our discussions on 7th May, however, indicated the necessity for backing information summaries with more permanent material against which the summaries can be read. To this end, I shall shortly be circulating to my colleagues some printed matter

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which will give information about social welfare, education, planning, industry, transport, agriculture, employment, finance and so forth. In addition, within the next few weeks I would intend to circulate monographs on what appear to be the more important background questions; the first of these will deal, as the Cabinet asked, with the question whether the Stormont Parliament is genuinely representative of the electorate. I must, however, make what I feel sure will be a readily understood reservation. We are not entitled to a degree of dogmatic certitude about political and social attitudes in Northern Ireland which we would not expect to find about political and social attitudes in Great Britain.

Home Office
Whitehall.

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