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CAB 4/1607/19

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD AT CHEQUERS
THURSDAY, 19 AUGUST 1971

PRESENT:

For the United Kingdom -

Prime Minister (Mr Heath)

Secretary of State for the Home
Department (Mr Maudling)

Secretary of State for Defence
(Lord Carrington)

Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs
(Sir Alec Douglas-Home)

Mr N Cairncross (Cabinet Office)

Mr R Armstrong (Principal Private
Secretary to the Prime Minister)

For Northern Ireland -

Prime Minister (Mr Faulkner)

Mr R Ramsay (Principal Private Secretary
to the Prime Minister)

Mr Heath welcomed Mr Faulkner and assured him that the United Kingdom Government would do everything possible to help in solving the various complex problems facing the Northern Ireland community. He also assured him that no constitutional change was contemplated; that any political initiatives would be within the framework of existing basic democratic structures; and that the United Kingdom Government would continue to give all possible help in the drive to eradicate terrorism and to establish peace.

SECURITY SITUATION

Lord Carrington said that, provided reasonable peace was restored on the streets following the immediate aftermath of internment, the Army intended to concentrate on Border security. Because of the flight south of a number of IRA men who had escaped the net it was to be expected that Border incidents would increase and there was already evidence of this. It was hoped that 3 or even 4 battalions could soon be spared for Border work, possibly within the next week or so. The question of closing unauthorised roads was raised and Mr Faulkner said that while spiking was not a proposition, large-scale cratering might be more effective.

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Lord Carrington said that the Army were taking a fresh look at the relative merits of the various methods of stopping unauthorised cross-Border traffic.

*St. Kenneth
last night* Mr Heath felt that the time had come to make further strong representations to Mr Lynch about better co-operation from his security forces, which Mr Faulkner described as being of little practical value at present. Sir Alec Douglas-Home agreed to take this matter up again.

In reply to a question from Mr Heath, Mr Faulkner said that the really serious bombing attacks had dramatically decreased since internment, but he warned that there could still be a number of skilled bomb planters at large, who could be re-grouping at present.

Mr Heath enquired about plans for the next stage of the internment operation and Mr Faulkner explained that while the security forces hoped soon to be in a position to carry out another "lift", the Special Branch were fully stretched at the moment carrying out interrogations and processing the material gained, which was better than expected. Lord Carrington agreed that there were sound practical reasons for concentrating on interrogation in the early days of detention, before the detainees had time to settle, and he, too, felt that the next swoop must be efficiently prepared for and carried out. Mr Heath urged that the second "lift" should be carried out at the earliest possible moment and that all available manpower resources be put into the interrogation and follow-up operations. (Mr Maudling pointed out that additional interrogators could not be made available from London since the Police Federation had been given an undertaking that their members would not be involved in any operations in Northern Ireland which involved the Special Powers Acts, and in any case a great deal of local knowledge was required on the part of an interrogator to make his contribution worth while).

POLITICAL PROBLEMS ARISING OUT OF ARMY ACTION

Mr Heath felt that greater efforts were necessary to counteract the propaganda being mounted against internment, the allegations of Army brutality and so on. Greater emphasis must be placed on the Appeal machinery and every effort must be made to convince outside opinion that the treatment of detainees or internees was humane. Mr Faulkner pointed out that the Advisory Committee would not come into being until people had actually been interned. He explained the moves which had been made to get a suitable Chairman and he mentioned that at present the Chairman in mind was Judge Brown (who is known personally to Mr Heath). As for the 2 laymen.

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Mr Faulkner had in mind Mr Berkeley, who had done the job before, and one Roman Catholic member, though he feared there might be difficulties in obtaining the services of a suitable man in that category because of the present climate.

Mr Maudling felt that even if Catholics declined, it should be publicly emphasised that they had been invited.

As to the widespread and intense propaganda campaign against the Army, Mr Heath felt that something positive must be done to redress the balance. All the Ministers agreed that the Army's resistance to Special Inquiries or Official Tribunals was well founded, but they felt that some sort of independent voice was needed to re-assure public opinion. It was agreed that the GOC's advice be sought regarding a suggestion that he should ask the UK Government to send over a high-powered 2-man team consisting of, say, a distinguished doctor and a lawyer, to make an independent, but not an official, legal inquiry as to how internment and other subsequent Army operations had been carried out. Mr Maudling thought that such a team should not only make an independent investigation and receive complaints from the public, but also track down complaints which had already been widely publicised - for example that of the Cardinal - and the people concerned asked to back up their allegations with facts.

Both Mr Heath and Sir Alec Douglas-Home felt that the Army must not be too kid-gloved in responding to the propaganda being poured out against it; good counter-propaganda must be forcibly put over at every opportunity. For example, many Catholics obviously sincerely believed that many internees had no direct involvement with the terrorists; the case of a 70-year-old man was frequently cited; but in this, as in similar cases, the Army should hit back with details of what they know of the activities of such people.

Mr Heath enquired as to whether the reaction to internment had been more violent than anticipated. Mr Maudling indicated that he thought this was so, but Mr Faulkner pointed out that there had been no mass reaction, in the sense of large-scale street rioting, which the IRA had obviously done everything possible to stimulate.

Mr Heath said that general conditions in which internees would live would become a major public preoccupation. Lord Carrington assured him that while the present conditions on the Maidstone were cramped, the accommodation being prepared was well above the standard of the average Army camp and that by 8 September some 150 men could be moved there. Sir Alec Douglas-Home said that it was inevitable that

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the Government should allow some independent, international organisation to see the conditions and he personally felt that this should be restricted to one universally respected organisation, possibly the International Red Cross. (All the UK Ministers were against Amnesty, which they did not hold in high esteem). Mr Heath suggested there might be merit in letting international observers view the new accommodation literally on the eve of occupation.

STRENGTH OF SECURITY FORCES

Lord Carrington said he would be most reluctant to send any more troops to Northern Ireland, and indeed he had hopes of withdrawing some, if things quietened down.

The question of a full-time UDR battalion was raised, but Lord Carrington clearly indicated there was little prospect of the Regiment being raised on a full-time basis. Advice from the GOC was that in practical terms there would be little net gain, as the usefulness of the existing UDR would be diminished by what seemed to be the likely withdrawal of Catholic members. An even more decisive factor was that when confidential soundings had been taken with them, both Mr Callaghan and Mr Thompson of the Labour Front Bench had said they would oppose the necessary Bill to enable the Regiment to be raised. The UK Ministers agreed that feelings on this topic were almost totally irrational, but they were nonetheless very strong and it could be disastrous to try to push the matter. Mr Heath approved of the practical alternative of full-time call-up for certain UDR members and believed this could be extended.

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POLITICAL PROBLEMS

Mr Heath deplored the wild newspaper talk, which had been to a certain extent stimulated by statements from Mr Lynch and he agreed with Mr Faulkner that such speculation had an unsettling effect right across the board in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, we had to face the fact that there was growing public interest in, and impatience with, the current Northern Ireland situation; Mr Lynch would undoubtedly continue to do his best to stir things up; the Party Conference season was almost upon us and the Labour Party, and indeed some sections of the Conservative Party, could be expected to dwell on the subject. Mr Heath felt that, if properly presented, the arguments in favour of the action taken against gunmen and terrorists would be accepted by British public opinion, particularly if strong emphasis were placed at the same time on what had been done and what was being done in terms of reform and social progress in Northern Ireland. What the man in the street in Great Britain was now looking to the Governments at Westminster and Stormont to do was to bring back the Parliamentary Opposition and somehow remove the fears of the minority, so that the country could settle down. The British Ministers acknowledged that public opinion over-simplified a complex and difficult situation, but some movement had to be seen in order to forestall pressure to do unreasonable things. For example, there had been a great clamour for tripartite talks. The British Government ruled this out completely and, fortunately, Mr Lynch's recent outburst had helped ease the pressure from responsible commentators for moves in that direction.

Mr Heath recognised the potential dangers of continued public pressure from Mr Lynch, but he felt that he could not very well refuse to see him. Naturally Mr Lynch could raise points about Northern Ireland, but equally, he, Mr Heath, could rule him out of court and at the same time take the opportunity of spelling out a few home truths. Mr Faulkner accepted this, but said it was vital that the position should be made unmistakably clear in public. The UK Ministers, for their part, accepted that it would be extremely difficult for the Northern Ireland Prime Minister to sit down with Mr Lynch while the latter was calling for the downfall of Stormont, possibly supporting civil disobedience campaigns, refusing to take effective action against Southern-based terrorists etc. Indeed Sir Alec Douglas-Home was tempted to recommend that Mr Heath, for the same reasons, refuse to see Mr Lynch, but on balance he thought that there should be one meeting at which Mr Heath could set out the UK Government's cases to Mr Lynch in the strongest possible terms.

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At the same time, the Foreign Secretary felt that it would be a pity if Mr Lynch were toppled, as he had personal qualities and influence which made him more desirable than any likely successor. Mr Faulkner doubted whether any successor could do less, in practical terms, to help the situation in Northern Ireland. Mr Heath said that when he met Mr Lynch the objectives from his point of view would be:-

- (a) to press the need for better border security;
- (b) to encourage Mr Lynch to in some way stiffen up the Courts; and
- (c) to urge upon him the need for internment, though frankly the British Government felt that Mr Lynch would only bring in internment if he felt his Government was directly threatened by the IRA (which had been his fear last December).

Mr Heath enquired whether it was thought that the Army in Southern Ireland would obey orders to clamp down on the IRA. Sir Alec thought they would, but he undertook to ask for an opinion from the Ambassador in Dublin.

Sir Alec thought there might be merit in bringing forward the meeting with Lynch, in order to have the showdown, and Mr Heath thought that it would be important to know exactly when the next "internment lift" would take place in order to judge this timing.

POSSIBLE POLITICAL INITIATIVES

The UK Ministers accepted that the Stormont Opposition had acted precipitately and unwisely in their withdrawal and subsequent actions and they agreed with Mr Faulkner that any moves to give the minority a greater say in the affairs of Northern Ireland could only be within the framework of normal, majority-rule democracy. Such suggestions as coalition Government were out of the question and any moves to make special provision for minority interests in a situation in which political power was out of their grasp in the foreseeable future would have to be broadly acceptable to the community as a whole. Mr Heath and his colleagues welcomed the initiatives already taken by Mr Faulkner and were very interested in the further suggestions put forward - an enlarged House of Commons, a reformed Upper House with wider activities and a number of nominated members, a possible Minority Advisory Body and so on. The UK Ministers recognised that these had not been put in detail to the Northern Ireland Cabinet but they expressed desire to have a detailed note of firm proposals and tentative suggestions before Mr Faulkner

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put these before his colleagues. The UK Ministers confessed that they could not produce better proposals than Mr Faulkner's, which were very much in line with the sort of progress they had in mind. They looked on the rule of the Westminster Government - a rule which they were sure the British public strongly wanted them to play - as being a catalyst in the process of reconciliation and progress.

Mr Heath was sure that people in Great Britain and elsewhere wanted to see people talking together again in Northern Ireland, even before the terrorist campaign was totally crushed. However culpable the Opposition and other minority leaders had been, there was a need to wean them away from extreme elements and to get them back into a more responsible position.

Mr Maudling had no very clear idea as to how this could be done, but he felt that he must be involved. At the same time, he was acutely aware of the danger of appearing to derogate from the authority of the Northern Ireland Government and he would welcome Mr Faulkner's advice as to how approaches to the minority should be made, where any meetings should be held, within what framework, and so on. The UK Government was frankly searching for some acceptable windowdressing, but they gave an assurance that there would never be any question of open-ended talks with minority representatives. The framework for any talks would be clearly defined before hand to all parties.

Mr Heath said his instinct was to keep any such initiative until immediately before the return of Parliament, though Mr Maudling felt that if things got worse, in terms of civil disobedience campaigns etc, the difficulty of wooing back the Opposition would increase. Mr Heath said that the sooner everyone was convinced that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland was not to be overthrown by terror or abstention or civil disobedience, the better and at the same time firm assurances from London that there would be no going back on reforms and that social progress would continue might do something to steady the minority.

Mr Heath indicated that he and his colleagues, if necessary, would face the Parliamentary dangers of amending the Government of Ireland Act to give effect to such proposals as enlarging the Northern Ireland House of Commons; they were frankly fearful of the wider aspects of the debates which would inevitably take place; but they thought that measures dealing with the Upper House might more easily be put through on a restricted basis.

Mr Faulkner said that he would not be against Mr Maudling having meetings with the Opposition or minority representatives, so long as it was clear to everyone what suggestions would not be acceptable. Mr Maudling gave a guarantee on this point and said that the UK Government would not be influenced by threats of blackmail from the Opposition to entertain proposals outside the framework they had in mind,

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for while he felt that his initiative would be necessary to satisfy British public and Parliamentary opinion, if the minority in Northern Ireland were seen to be rejecting reasonable proposals and to be making unreasonable demands, public opinion would not expect the Government to move any further in their direction. His sole object in planning to meet minority representatives was to convince them that there was an assured position for their community in the administration, as opposed to Government, of the country.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home supported this and emphasised that nothing should be done which could be interpreted by any stretch of the imagination as a first step towards Direct Rule - an idea which the British Government did not for one moment entertain. He personally thought that the embryonic proposals outlined by Mr Faulkner were sound politics and he felt that when the time came much should be made of their solid Parliamentary content.

Mr Faulkner welcomed Mr Maudling's guarantee that any talks would be on the basis that there would be no departure from the basic concept of majority rule, and indeed "one man, one vote" democracy, and he undertook to send the Home Secretary as soon as possible both details of the Parliamentary proposals and also his thoughts as to how best the Home Secretary should go about his initiative. He would also consult with his Cabinet colleagues on these matters as soon as possible.

INFORMATION TO THE PRESS

It was agreed that no formal communique should be released but that background briefing should be issued on the following basis:-

"There is of course no question of any change in the constitutional position in Northern Ireland. The opportunity was taken for a general and comprehensive review of the security, political and economic situation in Northern Ireland, and for a wide ranging exchange of views about possible developments and ideas for reconstruction and the restoration of community harmony within the existing constitutional framework, looking forward to the period when the security situation is once again brought under control. This is to be looked upon as one of a continuing series of meetings, designed to ensure that a close liaison is maintained between the UK Government and the Government of Northern Ireland."

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