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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Northern Ireland

A meeting was held at Chequers on Saturday 13 February 1971 at 5.30 p.m. The following were present:-

The Rt. Hon. Edward Heath, M.B.E., M.P.  
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

The Rt. Hon. Reginald Maudling, M.P.  
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt. Hon. Lord Carrington, K.C.M.G., M.C.  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Right Honourable Major J.D. Chichester-Clark,  
Prime Minister of Northern Ireland

Mr. R.T. Armstrong

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The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom asked the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland how he saw the situation developing in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland said that he saw no great change ahead. There was to be a special meeting of the Ulster Unionist Central Council on 1 March, but he did not expect that to present great difficulties, unless there was some unforeseen development in the meantime. He thought that Mr. Craig and Mr. West had lost a good deal of ground (Mr. Craig was a sick man),

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and the real centre of Right Wing opinion was now the Reverend Ian Paisley. Paisley's only real platform was the line that the British Army did not protect the Protestants and did not allow them to protect themselves: he argued that the police should not have been disarmed and the B Specials should not have been disbanded. Major Chichester-Clark did not think that Paisley had gained ground substantially; he might even have been losing ground until the recent rioting. He hoped that when the Home Secretary spoke in the House of Commons on 15 February he would make it clear that the British Government had no truck with Paisley and people of his kind.

Major Chichester-Clark agreed with the Home Secretary that it was difficult to see any scope for a new political initiative in Northern Ireland. He was inclined to agree that, at any rate until the shootings began a week ago, relations between the communities had been improving, though there was a long way to go before the ground lost in the last two years was recovered. Progress with the programme of reforms, and particularly of local government reform, had helped to bring about this improvement. The IRA were no longer as successful in getting the Catholics on to the streets as they had

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been in the past: the gossip in Belfast was that they were now dependent on intimidation and bribery to get people out. Their objective was to try to provoke the Protestants into a major eruption.

The Defence Secretary said that the security forces were in a difficult situation: they had to be careful not to press too hard so as to avoid provoking the Catholics; on the other hand, they had to be careful not to play too soft for fear of provoking the Protestants. One of their difficulties was that of identifying IRA terrorists operating in Belfast. It would help if the Special Branch were stronger, so that it could identify the IRA terrorists and bring about their elimination from the scene.

Major Chichester-Clark agreed that the Special Branch in Northern Ireland was not as good as it should be, and was reluctant to let the security forces use the information available to it, from a desire to protect its sources. The Home Secretary said that there were already some members of the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police in Northern Ireland, and the Commissioner was ready to give further help.

Major Chichester-Clark said that he would welcome

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more help from the Metropolitan Police Special Branch. But it was difficult to penetrate the Catholic enclaves, and intimidation by the IRA was affecting not only the willingness of people to give information to the police but also the willingness of juries to convict.

Major Chichester-Clark said that there were three possible sets of circumstances in which the Northern Ireland Government might be faced with the inevitability of a decision to introduce internment:-

- (i) if the Government of the Republic started to intern;
- (ii) if the IRA proceeded to a campaign of political assassination;
- (iii) if it proved impossible otherwise to break the "wall of silence".

He himself was against introducing internment, and so were the police. They would have to take in about 300 to 400 people, but there would be a lot of younger people whom the police did not know and who would not be picked up. Introduction of internment would bring crowds into the streets again; all the Civil Rights demonstrators would be given a new cause, just as their old causes were disappearing; and there would be risks of kidnappings.

\* Major Chichester-Clark had always made it clear that

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it was for the Northern Ireland Government to decide whether to introduce internment, but that they would not do so without consulting the British Government. He agreed that the Home Secretary might include a sentence to this effect in his speech to the House of Commons on 15 February. There was a sound practical reason for this consultation: it would not be possible for the Northern Ireland Government to hold internees without the help of the British Government. The gaol at Belfast was full. It would perhaps be possible to accommodate 80 to 120 internees at Armagh, but additional security preparations would have to be made, and it would not be possible to conceal the fact that they were being made. One possibility would be to use a ship, for instance HMS MAIDSTONE; but this was not attractive as a long term solution. Another possibility might be to set up an internment camp on Rathlin Island, but the Army would need six to eight weeks to prepare such a camp and the preparations could not be kept secret.

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom said that, if it was judged that the problem was now one of dealing with a hard core of IRA terrorism, the time had perhaps come to reconsider the strategy for the security forces. At present the security forces had to fight the IRA on

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ground and at times of their choosing. The question was how the tactical advantage could be transferred to the security forces. The phase of terrorism between 1959 and 1962 had been easier to deal with because it had not penetrated to the built-up areas. It might now be desirable to reinforce the police on the border and support them with contingents from the army.

Major Chichester-Clark said that some of the IRA people were now in para-military uniforms and carrying guns. At least one of those who had appeared in uniform at the recent funerals had been seen to drop a gun. His Government would like to take these people into custody, because their activities were a flagrant breach of law and order. After a discussion (and after telephone conversations between the Defence Secretary and the CGS) authority was given for mounting an operation in the early hours of Monday morning, 15 February, to pick up certain people whose identity and whereabouts were known.

In discussion the point was made that British public opinion would not indefinitely tolerate the situation in which British soldiers were being killed in Belfast. There were some signs of the development of this mood following the death of Gunner Curtis. Early action to pick up terrorists could help in this connection. It would be desirable to make it clear to British public opinion that this was not now a matter of inter-community

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rioting, but was a matter of outright shooting between the British Army and the IRA. From the point of view of British public opinion it could also be important that the British Government should be seen to be making a move with the Government of the Republic.

In the longer term, it was suggested that the introduction of proportional representation could be useful in Northern Ireland. Major Chichester-Clark said that he saw some attractions about this as a way of dealing with some of the problems of Northern Ireland, but the political difficulties of making such a change should not be underestimated. He did not see how it would ever be possible to include in the Northern Ireland Government representatives of a party whose fundamental belief was that there should be no separate Northern Ireland Government. It was not that leading Catholics in Northern Ireland wanted actively to take steps to promote a united Ireland in the near future; but they would not want to be associated with an institution which perpetuated the division of North and South. It would clearly be difficult to get any system of proportional representation going before the next General Election in Northern Ireland, which was due in 1974. In the meantime the reform of local government was going on.

There was general agreement that there was a risk that the deteriorating economic situation of Northern Ireland would aggravate the political problem.

The new jobs created in 1970 numbered only 2,000 against an

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objective of 6,000 to 7,000. If the RB211 project were to collapse, there would be serious trouble for Shorts. The future of Harland and Wolff was uncertain now that Fred Olsen had dropped out. Mr. Onassis's proposition was not particularly attractive.

The Defence Secretary said that the Home Secretary might well be pressed to call some kind of conference on Northern Ireland in which all the various interests could be represented. The fact of holding such a conference could be helpful in reassuring public opinion in Britain, even if it produced no positively beneficial result; and it should serve to isolate still more obviously the people who advocated violence. Such a conference might produce a declaration about the need for additional investment in Northern Ireland and the importance of restoring political stability as a basis for that investment.

There was some discussion about the initiative for calling such a conference. If the position of the Northern Ireland Government were not to be undermined, it should be called by the Northern Ireland Government rather than by the British Government. On the other hand it might be less easy for the Northern Ireland Government than for the British Government to bring representatives of all the parties affected round a table. It would be desirable if the conference could include representatives of the political parties, but it should not degenerate into

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a mere slanging match. One possibility might be for the Governor of Northern Ireland to call such a conference.

It was agreed that the possibility of holding such a conference should be considered further by the Home Secretary and the Northern Ireland Government.

Major Chichester-Clark said that he felt that the structure of the security forces in Northern Ireland was not yet right. With an unarmed police backed by the Ulster Defence Regiment, the army were too quickly involved when incidents occurred. He believed that it was right not to rearm the police, but it was for question whether there would be a case for introducing an armed force which could be called upon before the army were involved: something like the National Guard in the United States, though in some respects that was not a very happy precedent. This was something which would need very careful consideration.

This concluded the discussion at the meeting. Those present were joined for dinner by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, and two additional points emerged in subsequent discussion:

- (i) It would be useful if the British Government could make it clear that they were in constant touch with the Government of the Republic.
- (ii) There might be scope for useful representations to the Government of the Republic on the nature of the

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instructions given to commanders of contingents  
of the Irish Army stationed on the border for dealing  
with those suspected of membership of the IRA.

RWA

15 February 1971

Copies to:

Private Secretaries to: Home Secretary

Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary

Defence Secretary

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