

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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2/7/81

Note
Returned to-day by
private sec. with
this message
"Seen by Tavis, each"

S.19284 C.C.

PSOI
PSS
Mr. Welton
Mr. White
Mr. W. King
Whitway

Note:

Mr. Whitway called to see me at 11.a.m. today. He began by saying that Ambassador Figg would have wanted to convey this message but he is occupied with the H-Blocks situation and other officers at the Embassy were on leave. The purpose of his visit was to give us prior notice of what Mr. Atkins intends to say in the House of Commons this afternoon. He read from a telex message which seemed to be a summary of Mr. Atkins statement.

7.7.81

The British Government have decided that since the local political parties in Northern Ireland are still unable to agree, no administration with actual power is possible. However, they feel that there should be a political forum in Northern Ireland. Accordingly they have decided to set up a Northern Ireland Advisory Council with the following purposes:-

- (a) to consider and advise on the policies and activities of the Northern Ireland Government Departments.
- (b) to scrutinise and advise on proposed legislation in Northern Ireland.
- (c) to consider and report on the form of Government that might be acceptable to both parts of the community.

In all these aspects the Council will have a purely advisory role. No actual powers will be exercised and therefore the question of powersharing does not arise. For reasons of speed there will be no election or Bill. Instead an administrative act will bring it into being. Mr. Atkins will ask the main parties in Northern Ireland to nominate representatives from among their members who have already been elected Westminster M.P.'s, members of the European Parliament, and District Councillors. Nominations will be in proportion to the strength of the parties in the District Council following the May elections.

The Council will number approximately 50.

The Council will have three attributes:-

1. It will offer a political forum for Northern Ireland Deputies.
2. It will enable a Northern Ireland voice to be heard on key issues and Northern Ireland advice to UK Ministers.
3. It will give local representatives the opportunity to consider together how actual powers might be transferred back to local hands.

In the course of the summer Mr. Atkins will discuss details of the Council with the parties in Northern Ireland and he hopes that the Council will be in effect by the end of the year. Its progress will then be monitored. Mr. Whiteway said that Mr. Atkins will emphasise the value of the development of the unique relationship between the UK and the Republic. Mr. Atkins will express the hope that this development and the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies will continue under the new establishment of a political forum in Northern Ireland will help in the Anglo-Irish relationship by enabling a Northern Ireland voice to be heard and possibly even paving the way for eventual Northern Ireland involvement.

Ronan Murphy

Ronan Murphy

2 July 1981.

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