

FUTURE POLICY GROUP

1. A meeting of the Future Policy Group was held in the Ministerial Conference Room, Stormont Castle at 11 30 am on Wednesday, 24 May 1972. Those present were:-

- Sir William Niell, Permanent Under Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office (Chairman) (No 1)
- Sir Harold Black, Central Secretariat (2)
- Mr Howard Drake, Central Secretariat (3) *Mr Holden*
- Mr Kidd, Ministry of Finance (4) *Mr Woodfield*
- Mr Hill, Ministry of Home Affairs (8)
- Mr Aiken, Ministry of Health and Social Services (9) *Mr Bloomfield (6)*
- Mr Shea, Ministry of Education (10)
- Mr Brooke, Ministry of Commerce (11)
- Dr Oliver, Ministry of Development (12)
- Mr Slinger, Ministry of Community Relations (13)
- Mr Smith, Special Adviser (14)
- Mr McAllister, Central Secretariat (16) *Mr Young (15)* *Shumell (held) (17)*

Apologies were received from Mr Holden, Central Secretariat, and Mr Young, Ministry of Agriculture.

SECURITY SITUATION:

2. A general discussion on the security situation took place during which Sir William Niell said that he welcomed the opportunity of discussing this important topic with Permanent Secretaries and would be quite happy to see it included on the agenda for subsequent meetings of the Future Policy Group as and when considered desirable.

CONSIDERATION OF PAPER ON "REVIEW OF OPTIONS FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT":

3. Sir William Niell said that the paper under consideration had been prepared by Mr Bloomfield as a starting point for discussion which it was hoped would lead to the submission to the Secretary of State of a paper setting out the views of heads of Northern Ireland Departments on the options open for a political settlement in Northern Ireland.

4. After discussion the following general points were agreed:-

- (a) Northern Ireland as an independent State could not be regarded as a serious option because it would be economically disastrous, psychologically unacceptable and conducive to greater instability rather than the reverse;

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- (b) Northern Ireland could only be embodied in an all-Ireland State with the consent of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland;
- (c) in any settlement adopted it would be necessary to look to the Government in the Republic for a much more constructive contribution towards the maintenance of stability in the whole island of Ireland.

5. Mr Hill said that "integration" solutions would be opposed by the minority community and by many members of the majority community including possibly the Unionist Party. He said that he favoured a "devolutionary" solution but regarded paragraph 3(b)(iv) of the paper under consideration which dealt with the powers of a devolutionary Parliament as being of crucial importance. He suggested that if there were to be a devolutionary Parliament it would be necessary for that Parliament to have responsibility for law and order. In relation to co-operation with the Republic of Ireland he thought that Common Market membership for the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland would create a new situation where greater co-operation could more easily develop and that the concept of a Joint Ministerial Council of Ireland mentioned in paragraph 5(b) of Mr Bloomfield's paper was worthy of further consideration.

6. Mr Brooke said that the practical options open were considerably reduced by the decision to proceed with the re-organisation of local government as previously planned. The pattern of administration adopted for services in Northern Ireland required a regional administration of some kind interposed between the District Councils and the Westminster Parliament. He considered that something on the lines of the Greater London Council was the minimum necessary as the top tier of "the Macrory system". While favouring a devolutionary solution he emphasised that careful consideration would have to be given to the functions of the Regional Authority and saw particular difficulties in the fields of law and order and finance.

7. Dr Oliver said that the major problem in Northern Ireland over the years had been instability and he believed the only solution which was likely to produce stability was that of complete integration of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom. He said

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that a major contributory factor to instability in the island of Ireland was the claim of the Government of the Republic to sovereignty over the whole island and he considered that integration of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom would produce a new situation in which a new and more constructive relationship could be developed between the United Kingdom and the Republic. Within the integration solution he thought there would be a place for a local administration which would be essentially non-political.

8. Mr Kidd said that he favoured a devolutionary solution but considered that it was vitally important that the functions given to the devolved authority should be such as would attract people of real ability into service in that authority. He said that if there were to be an improvement in relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland it would be necessary for the Republic to make some move to liberalise its existing Constitution. He suggested that Common Market membership would assist in bringing about a new climate of co-operation in Ireland. Although favouring a devolutionary solution he emphasised that it would be a mistake to rush important decisions about the longer-term political future in Northern Ireland and in this context he suggested that paragraph 3(b) of Mr Bloomfield's paper was perhaps overstated. In particular he suggested that once the legislation necessary for the re-organisation of local government had been processed the legislative arrangements under the Temporary Provisions Act would be less susceptible to criticism as there would be considerably less pressure on parliamentary time at Westminster for Northern Ireland business.

9. Mr Shea said that a Government of Northern Ireland should be re-established and that guarantees of the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom equivalent to those enshrined in the Government of Ireland Act should be given by both the United Kingdom Government and the Government of the Republic of Ireland. He considered that this would force the Government in the Republic to take more responsibility for the preservation of stability in Ireland and would also contribute to the development of better relationships between the two Governments in Ireland and the Government at Westminster. Rather than reducing the powers of the Northern Ireland Government he favoured increasing the powers which had been given to the previous

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Stormont Government in the hope that this would raise the level of political life in Northern Ireland. He considered that integration would lead to an increase in instability in that it would be unacceptable to many on both sides of the traditional divisions. In addition he thought there could be difficulties in attempting to legislate for Northern Ireland at Westminster in the fields, for example, ^{of} homosexuality, divorce and education. He supported Mr Kidd's view that it would be a mistake to rush decisions on the long-term political settlement.

10. Mr Aiken favoured full integration on the grounds that for some time prior to prorogation it had been clear that the important decisions relating to Northern Ireland were made at Westminster rather than Stormont. In particular he said that the financial relationship between the Westminster and Stormont Government was one which made real independence of action on the part of the Northern Ireland Government meaningless. He suggested however that it would be necessary in reaching decisions on the political future of Northern Ireland to take into account the recommendations of the Crowther Commission.

11. Mr Slinger said that he favoured a devolutionary solution and thought that something between the powers of the prorogued Stormont and the powers of the Greater London Council would be appropriate for the regional administration. He said that designation of the precise functions would undoubtedly be difficult and should be the subject of careful consideration.

12. Sir Harold Black said that he favoured a devolutionary solution but emphasised that the return of a regional administration did not mean necessarily return of Stormont as it was. He said that consideration of the appropriate form of regional administration should involve careful examination of how power could be satisfactorily shared in Northern Ireland. He was opposed to integration because he considered that it would be likely to perpetuate instability in that it would be unacceptable to many in Northern Ireland and particularly to the minority community, who would see it as a permanent block to all hope of reunification of Ireland. In addition it would almost certainly be opposed by the Labour Party at Westminster, who on past pronouncements clearly favoured keeping open the possibility of reunification.

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13. After further discussion it was agreed that Sir Harold Black should consider how best to take discussion of this important topic a stage further and that the next meeting should take place at 11 30 am on Wednesday, 31 May 1972.

J B McALLISTER

26 May 1972

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