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EXTRACTS FROM A SPEECH GIVEN BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR MERLYN REES MP, TO MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT AT WESTMINSTER TONIGHT (20 JANUARY):

Over the past few days the people of Northern Ireland
have had an opportunity to consider the White Paper
on the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention.

This sets out the Government's view on the Report
which was submitted to it by the Constitutional
Convention at the conclusion of its deliberations in
November 1975. The Report has been carefully
considered by Government and has been debated by the
Parliament of the United Kingdom. The White Paper
sets out what is the considered view of the
democratically elected representatives of the
population of the United Kingdom as a whole.

It does more than that. It makes it clear that
although the Report itself does not command
sufficiently widespread acceptance throughout the
community in Northern Ireland to provide suitable

/and effective

and effective Government, there are nevertheless a number of areas upon which agreement has or could be reached. Above all the Government has accepted in principle the recommendation that power should be returned to a Government within Northern Ireland and I repeat that this is, in the view of the Government and the Parliament, the outcome we should prefer to see, always provided it is an agreed outcome.

There is now a great opportunity for all parties to work together for the future of Northern Ireland. It is an opportunity which if lost cannot recur for some time; there will be no local parliament.

The
Constitutional Convention can take the opportunity of achieving a constructive solution. It has been asked to consider and report upon:

/ (a)

- (a) how best agreement can be reached on a system of government built on the principles on which there is already widespread agreement, and providing for a form of partnership and participation, and which will command the most widespread acceptance throughout the whole of the community in Northern Ireland and in both parts of that community;
- (b) whether a committee system might be of value as part of a wider and acceptable constitutional framework;
- (c) whether progress could best be made on the basis of setting up a system of government which, though not temporary, is capable of evolving over a period of time into permanent and agreed constitutional arrangements;

Everything now turns on the answers which the people and politicians of Northern Ireland give to these

/three points.

three points. If they could come to agreement on them then a great step forward would have been taken towards the achievement of what all parties in Northern Ireland quite clearly desire, that is to say an agreed form of regional government for Northern Ireland.

These three matters do not represent merely a minor area of disagreement. In the minds of many people in Northern Ireland they may be thought to be fundamental. But again I must emphasise the need for the broader approach. The Government of the United Kingdom and the Parliament of the United Kingdom have given their considered views. To belong to the United Kingdom means accepting the authority of the Queen in Parliament.

In all this there is a British dimension. There are 57,000,000 other people whose views must be taken into account; and it will again be within the

/Parliament

Parliament at Westminster that the final decisions will be taken. If the people of Northern Ireland and their elected representatives show the willingness and determination to fulfill their responsibilities, they will find a reciprocal willingness and determination on the part of the Government, Parliament and people of the whole United Kingdom to help them solve the difficult and complex problems which face them.

It is now a matter of the politicians in Northern Ireland to show that they can rise above the myths of history which have for so long blocked the path of constructive progress. They must consider carefully whether they are reflecting the mood of the ordinary people of Northern Ireland and give to them the responsible leadership which is so essential at this time.

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in the weeks to come important decisions have to be taken.

Before ~~this~~ decision is taken every single person, elected or elector, must think very very seriously about the consequences which could flow from a rejection of the expressed views of the Government and Parliament of the United Kingdom to which they belong.

It is as simple as that.

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