

Subject a master

John C. C. C.

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NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER  
AND MR JAMES MOLYNEAUX ON TUESDAY 22nd MAY 1984

The Prime Minister saw Mr Molyneaux at his request, to discuss one or two aspects of the Government's current Northern Ireland policy.

First, Mr Molyneaux proposed to the Prime Minister that the Government might consider extending the normal 12 month time limit which at present applies to the excessive annual renewal Orders which apply to the present regime of direct rule in Northern Ireland. The next renewal Order comes up in June. Mr Molyneaux enquired whether it might be possible to give it a much longer, perhaps indefinite, application. This would remove an element of uncertainty from the Northern Ireland scene, since the 12 month limit always suggested to the Loyalist community that the Government had some fundamental scheme over the horizon which might change the status of the Province. This feeling would have been more of a factor when the renewal Order came up next month, because of the general discussion about the future of Northern Ireland which had been sparked off by the New Ireland Forum report. Mr Molyneaux was at pains to stress that, in his view, the latter report showed only too clearly that Dublin was still seeking above all a unitary state in the island of Ireland. To this extent they were on common ground with the Terrorist organisations, although naturally they did not share the Terrorist means for attaining the common need.

The Prime Minister took note of the views expressed by Mr Molyneaux and told him that she saw no possibility at present of extending the early timescale of the renewal Order. The uncertainty that Mr Molyneaux referred to was above all a product of the civil instability caused by the continuation of the use of Terrorist techniques in Northern Ireland and the overriding priority must be to stamp out violence and Terrorism.

Mr Molyneaux went on from there to discuss the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and remarked that he saw little prospect that the SDLP would fully be able to take part in it. It was run, in every way, including its standing orders and procedures, too much like the old Stormont Parliament, and he felt that the SDLP would always associate it with the bad old days of Stormont. If, however, the Assembly could be directed and diverted much more into devolved local government, it might become more acceptable.

The Prime Minister took note of what Mr Molyneaux said.

MICHAEL ALISON

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