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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

MR. GOODALL
CABINET OFFICE

Thank you for your letter of 24 May enclosing a draft note of the conclusions of this morning's meeting on Northern Ireland.

I have returned the draft with one or two suggestions for amendment. I agree that it should be converted into a Cabinet Office note and also agree with your proposals for distribution.

A. J. COLES

24 May 1984

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24 May 1984

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Dear John

Northern Ireland

I attach a draft note of the conclusions of this morning's meeting on Ireland. I suggest that, like the two earlier records of similar meetings, it should be a Cabinet Office note. But perhaps on this occasion it could be copied CMO to all those who attended the meeting.

Yours ever

David

A D S GOODALL

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SECRET AND PERSONAL

Draft Note for Record

Northern Ireland

The Prime Minister held a meeting on 24 May to consider ~~the~~ policy on Northern Ireland. Those present were the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Antony Acland, Mr Robert Andrew, Sir Philip Woodfield, ^{and} Mr David Goodall, ~~Mr Robin Butler and~~ ~~Mr John Coles.~~

2. The meeting had before it a minute by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Prime Minister dated 22 May and a minute by the Secretary of the Cabinet to the Prime Minister dated 23 May covering papers analysing the Irish proposals put forward by the Secretary of the Irish Government, Mr Dermot Nally on 11 May and examining possible options for action by the British Government in the light of Mr Nally's approach.

3. It was noted that the Nally proposals for the joint exercise of authority in Northern Ireland under continued British sovereignty went ^{well} ~~far~~ beyond the ideas for shared responsibility in the fields of security and the administration of justice which Sir Robert Armstrong had put to the Irish with Cabinet agreement on 1 March; and that the Irish Government's offer, contained in the Nally proposals, to enshrine its recognition of the Union in a bilateral treaty without amending the Irish Constitution, ^{though not without value,} fell some way short of the solemn declaration of commitment on which the Armstrong ideas had been posited. On the one hand it was argued that no Irish Government could afford to be seen to be associated with the British Government in joint security arrangements in Northern Ireland without being able to ^{demonstrate} ~~claim~~ that it had acquired some share of political responsibility for affairs in the Province; and that the Irish would have to be offered some

accommodation on this point in any initiative by the British Government on Northern Ireland which was dependent on the Irish Government's ^{cooperation.} ~~accommodation~~. As against this it was ^{argued} ~~pointed out~~ that any significant erosion of sovereignty in Northern Ireland, such as would be reflected in the appointment of an Irish Government representative resident in the Province, would be ^{likely to be} seen by the Unionists as a betrayal of their interests and could lead to increased violence. It was suggested that in framing any new initiative renewed consideration should be given to the possibility of making adjustments to the Border so as to incorporate predominantly Catholic areas of the Province into the Republic while strengthening the proportionate ^{Unionist} majority ~~of~~ ~~the Unionists~~ in the remainder of the territory.

4. It was agreed that a new British initiative on Northern Ireland was ^{desirable} ~~required~~ both in order to reduce the toll of violence in the Province and by way of response to the New Ireland Forum Report. The attempt to strike an acceptable balance between the United Kingdom's political requirements and those of the Irish Republic should be pursued; and it remained an essential pre-condition of any involvement by the Republic in the affairs of the Province that the Republic should enter into a binding commitment to recognise Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom. Consideration might be given to working out with the Irish an agreed statement of general principles on which ^a ~~any~~ new approach might be based, but this should not be done until Ministers had agreed on the practical steps which might follow from the principles proposed.

devise a proposal which would

5. It was noted that Unionist opinion showed some signs of readiness to contemplate a role for the Nationalist minority in devolved Government for Northern Ireland and it was suggested

that this might open the way to converting the Northern Ireland Assembly into a top tier of local government with a wider measure of devolved responsibilities. But it was recognised that it was almost certain that the SDLP could not be attracted into such an Assembly without providing a link of some kind with the Republic.

6. In further discussion it was suggested that elements to be included in a possible package might be:-

- (a) the solemn Irish undertaking to recognise the union, the importance of which had already been stressed;
- (b) the introduction of a series of minor measures to meet Nationalist concerns, including repeal of the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act;
- (c) some adjustment in the powers and modus operandi of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- (d) a development of the Republic's links with Northern Ireland within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council, and the establishment of a joint Parliamentary body;
- (e) the establishment of an all-Ireland law commission charged with the harmonisation of the criminal law throughout Ireland;
- (f) the establishment of a joint economic commission;
- (g) solemn guarantees by both Governments to both communities on the lines suggested in the Nally proposals;
- (h) the development of joint security arrangements, possibly including joint policing;
- (i) adjustments to the Border.

7. The Secretary of the Cabinet was instructed to arrange for his group of senior officials to examine the feasibility of a package of proposals incorporating some or all of the foregoing elements; to identify a range of possible options; and to make recommendations.