



10 DOWNING STREET

Clive

Despite the attached letter,
Mr Prier remains determined
to introduce his Bill this
week - giving notice
tonight, and taking introduction
and first reading tomorrow.

F Pym vetoed this
yesterday. J Biffen is
hardly in a position to
lay down the law. PM will,
I fear, have to decide
whether Mr Prier gets his
way, or whether we have
a row.

MP

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

CONFIDENTIAL

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- 1. ATC ^{5/4}
- 2. CAW ^{MW SW}

We arranged for this letter to go round, as the week-end's discussion amends a Cabinet decision.

5 April 1982

Then ra.

MW 5/4

Dear Mike

NORTHERN IRELAND: A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVOLUTION

I am writing to confirm that, following discussion today with the Lord President, and with the agreement of the Prime Minister, my Secretary of State is announcing in the House this afternoon the publication of the White Paper today, but he will not be arranging for the First Reading and publication of the bill before Easter. The bill's timing will not, therefore, accord fully with what was anticipated at last Thursday's Cabinet meeting.

I am copying this letter to Private Secretaries to all members of Cabinet and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

CONFIDENTIAL

MF

Boelund

Northern Ireland

I attach the text of Mr Prior's statement. It went down well in the House.

Don Concannon expressed Opposition support for the fundamental aims. Labour favoured devolution, and the proposals were broadly in line with their thinking. But they were uncertain about timing. The improvement of social conditions and economic recovery needed greater attention, and might be a greater priority. But they supported elections. There was no better way of isolating the men of violence than encouraging the people to participate in the democratic process. He sought guidance on the timing of a bill: stressed the importance of preserving the powers of Westminster; drew attention to the problems of Heads of Northern Ireland Departments who might have two political masters; expressed regret that there was not more about the role of the Irish Republic; and ended by stressing that acceptability to both communities was central. Mr Prior said that he would welcome a debate on the White Paper ahead of a debate on the Bill, but thought it might be convenient for the House if the Bill was presented before the debate on the White Paper took place.

Mr Molyneux described it as shameful to launch an operation to erode the rights and privileges of British subjects on the day a task force departed to the Falkland Islands. The statement echoed an FCO statement on the Falkland Islands in December 1980. Mr Prior responded that this attitude degraded his party. It was a difficult day for the Government but the House owed it to the people of Northern Ireland to keep going on this course.

Ian Paisley predictably welcomed the elections but attacked what he saw as a 70% vote required to meet Unionists' wishes whilst a simple majority would suffice for those who wanted to destroy the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. Enoch Powell said that, as we stood on the brink of a perhaps grave and long-lasting conflict, it would be wise to allow mature time for the White Paper to be considered, before the Government committed itself to the form of legislation, or to a series of debates, which would promote disunity within the United Kingdom. Julian Amery echoed this warning

/against

against divisive steps at this stage, and supported the call for a debate before legislation.

Clive Solely, Russell Johnston, Neville Sandelson, Kevin McNamara, Tom Arnold and Brian Mawhinney all supported Mr Prior to varying degrees. Gerry Fitt wished him well. But with the OUU, SDLP, and the Eire Government having expressed total opposition, there was little hope of success if these groups renewed their electoral mandate. At this stage another failure would be disastrous for Northern Ireland. John Biggs-Davison, Harold McCusker, Peter Robinson and Philip Goodhart spoke to their well-known views. Albert Duffy asked why Mr Prior was so nervous of the Parliamentary tier for the Anglo/Irish Council. He wanted to know who had warned off Mr Prior.

Mr Prior answered that his experience showed that Members of the House would be very reluctant to give up any of their sovereignty. Responding to Brian Mawhinney's support, he thanked Mr Mawhinney for his help and advice over many months. Mr Prior hoped that some of the resistance from the Government side of the House could be mitigated by the step by step approach.

M. A. PATTISON

5 April, 1982

Business of the House

3.39 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Francis Pym): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short business statement.

The business on Wednesday 7 April will now be a debate on the Falkland Islands, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Mr. Michael Foot (Ebbw Vale): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement. It was clearly the desire of the House on Saturday that there should be a further debate at the earliest possible moment. However, in the light of the announcements made today, can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House who will be speaking for the Government in the debate?

Mr. Pym: I cannot answer that matter of detail at this moment. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Government's position will be put clearly and in a forthright way, as no doubt will that of the Opposition.

Northern Ireland (Political Developments)

3.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. James Prior): I will, with permission, make a statement on political developments in Northern Ireland.

The Government have today published a White Paper setting out proposals for the election of an Assembly, which would provide a framework within which a devolved Government might again be set up in Northern Ireland. These proposals are designed to meet two objectives: first, to provide at once a means for greater democratic participation by the people of Northern Ireland in their own affairs; secondly, to give them the opportunity to evolve for themselves a form of government acceptable to them.

The Government propose that there should be an election later this year to a new Northern Ireland assembly. While consideration of the arrangements for a devolved administration will be its most crucial task, the Assembly will from its first day have important scrutinising, deliberative and consultative functions. It will be able to report on a wide range of topics, and its reports will be laid before Parliament. The Assembly will establish Committees corresponding to each of the Northern Ireland Departments to monitor and report on their policies and activities.

The Assembly will from the outset be empowered to recommend arrangements under which the whole or part of the full range of legislative and executive responsibilities, which were devolved in 1973, could be exercised by the Assembly and by a devolved administration answerable to it. If the Assembly sends to the Secretary of State proposals which have the support of 70 per cent. of the total membership of the Assembly, he will be required under statute to lay those proposals before Parliament for its consideration. He would also have discretion to present to Parliament proposals which did not command 70 per cent. support, but which in his view enjoyed the support of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland.

I should like to make two things clear: first, the parties in Northern Ireland will have wide discretion about the basis on which a devolved administration and Assembly might be formed and operate—Her Majesty's Government are not seeking to impose any particular system; secondly, the Government would not recommend any arrangements to Parliament unless they believed them to be acceptable to both sides of the Northern Ireland community. Stable government can come only from such acceptability. If Parliament approved the Assembly's recommendations, powers would be devolved by Order in Council.

The Assembly will have the option of moving to full devolution of powers from the outset or, if it seems easier to achieve agreement on devolving the responsibilities of only some Northern Ireland Departments, to make proposals for partial devolution.

The arrangements will be flexible in that partial devolution could lead to further or full devolution, and if the agreement on which devolution was based collapsed and could not be re-established it would be possible for the Assembly to revert to its scrutinising, consultative and deliberative functions, with the Secretary of State taking back other responsibilities.