CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Wednesday, 7th May, 1969, at 5 p.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. HAROLD WILSON, M P, Prime Minister
The Right Hon. MICHAEL STEWART, M P, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
The Right Hon. LORD GARDINER, Lord Chancellor
The Right Hon. BARBARA CASTLE, M P, First Secretary of State and Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity
The Right Hon. DENIS HEALEY, M P, Secretary of State for Defence
The Right Hon. PETER SHORE, M P, Secretary of State for Economic Affairs
The Right Hon. GEORGE THOMSON, M P, Minister without Portfolio
The Right Hon. RICHARD MARSH, M P, Minister of Transport
The Right Hon. CLEDWYN HUGHES, M P, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
The Right Hon. GEORGE THOMAS, M P, Secretary of State for Wales
The Right Hon. ROY JENKINS, M P, Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Right Hon. RICHARD CROSSMAN, M P, Secretary of State for Social Services
The Right Hon. JAMES CALLAGHAN, M P, Secretary of State for the Home Department
The Right Hon. FRED PEART, M P, Lord President of the Council
The Right Hon. WILLIAM ROSS, M P, Secretary of State for Scotland
The Right Hon. EDWARD SHORT, M P, Secretary of State for Education and Science
The Right Hon. ANTHONY GREENWOOD, M P, Minister of Housing and Local Government
The Right Hon. LORD SHACKLETON, Lord Privy Seal
The Right Hon. ROY MASON, M P, Minister of Power

The Right Hon. JOHN DIAMOND, M P,
Chief Secretary, Treasury (Item 1)

Also present:
The Right Hon. Sir ELWYN JONES, Q C, M P, Attorney-General
## Secretariat:

Sir Burke Trend  
Miss J. J. Nunn  
Mr. R. R. D. McIntosh  
Sir Robin Hooper  
Mr. P. J. Hudson  
Mr. D. H. J. Hilary

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SECRET
1. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary reported that he had that afternoon made a statement in the House of Commons regarding the future of Greece in the Council of Europe. The Council's Committee of Ministers had agreed that a decision on the position of the Greek Government would be taken either at their next regular meeting, which would take place at the latest in December, or, if the report of the Council's Human Rights Commission was available earlier, at a special meeting. Some progress had therefore been made, since it had now been accepted that, by December at the latest, either the Greek Government would have been able to convince the Commission that it was making progress towards the re-establishment of democracy in Greece, or the Committee would have to agree that Greece should be suspended from membership of the Council of Europe or expelled from it. He would circulate a brief note of the position for the information of his colleagues.

The Cabinet—

(1) Took note of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's statement.

(2) Invited him to circulate a brief note on the lines he had indicated.

*The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary informed his colleagues of the latest situation in regard to Mr. Gerald Brooke. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that Mr. Brooke had been visited by H.M. Consul on 5th May. The Consul had previously been informed by the Soviet authorities that further proceedings against Mr. Brooke for alleged acts of espionage had been instituted. The decision to institute proceedings did not, however, indicate that the Soviet authorities had finally determined that Mr. Brooke should be brought to a fresh trial. Under Soviet law, the laying of a charge against an accused person was followed by a period of investigation, which might continue for two to nine months, and only at the end of this period was it decided whether or not to bring the accused to trial. It was thus still possible for the Soviet authorities to abandon the proceedings without loss of face. It was however most important for this purpose that we should not confirm publicly that the Soviet authorities had decided to institute proceedings. Mrs. Brooke, who had shown herself to be very discreet, had been told in

* Previously recorded in a Confidential Annex.
confidence. In public, however, it would be essential not to go beyond the terms of his statement in the House of Commons, in which he had informed the House of the Consul’s visit to Mr. Brooke but had said no more on the point of possible action by the British Government than that any Soviet decision to submit Mr. Brooke to a further trial would have grave consequences for Anglo-Soviet relations.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that Mr. Brooke had appeared to be in fair condition when seen by our Consul; but his health was not good, and the prospect of a further long prison sentence must be viewed with some anxiety. It had been made clear to the Soviet Ambassador in London that any retrial of Mr. Brooke would ensure that there would be no possibility of the Krogers being released before 1974 at the earliest, but that if it were agreed that Mr. Brooke would be released at the end of his present sentence we would then be prepared to discuss the matter of the Krogers further.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he had been considering whether there were any further retaliatory measures, in addition to the expulsion of known Soviet intelligence agents in the Soviet Embassy in London to which he had referred in his last report to his colleagues, which we might take if, despite our warnings, Mr. Brooke was subjected to a fresh trial. It was difficult to devise any such measures which would be both effective and more injurious to Soviet interests than to our own; and he had not yet reached firm conclusions.

The Cabinet—

(3) Took note of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary’s statement.

The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C (69) 45) which outlined the recent history behind political events in Northern Ireland, appraised the current political situation, considered the implications of the use of troops and discussed what should be the broad objectives of the United Kingdom Government’s policy.

The Home Secretary said that it was important to remember that the Northern Ireland Government were not in power against the wishes of the majority of the Northern Ireland population. They represented more than half of the electorate, some of whom indeed thought that the Government were not being active enough in defence of their interests; and if the United Kingdom Government

* Previously recorded in a Confidential Annex.
introduced direct rule, the majority of the Northern Ireland population would oppose it. This was being increasingly realised by those members of the Labour Party who wanted the United Kingdom Government to intervene directly. Good progress had been made in Northern Ireland since the Prime Minister and he had seen Captain O'Neill, then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, in November, 1968. Four of the five points which they had made to Captain O'Neill had been adopted by the Northern Ireland Government, and although they had not yet all been implemented steps were being taken to that end; and the fifth had been adopted in principle. The influence of the United Kingdom Government had been beneficial, and the presence of television cameras and reporters in Northern Ireland had made a substantial impact there. He had had a telephone discussion with the new Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Major Chichester-Clark, who accepted the understanding that troops could be used only after a request from Government to Government, understood that the use of troops would in certain circumstances have constitutional implications and agreed that there would be no going back on “one man, one vote”. The Home Secretary had arranged that Major Chichester-Clark and some of his Ministers should meet the Prime Minister and himself in London on 21st May.

The Home Secretary said that since he had spoken to Major Chichester-Clark, the amnesty for those convicted in connection with the demonstrations had been announced. This would benefit the supporters both of the Reverend Ian Paisley and of the civil rights movement and had apparently been fairly well received in Northern Ireland. On balance he thought that Major Chichester-Clark had been right to declare the amnesty.

The civil rights movement still contained people of high ideals but it had been infiltrated by less desirable elements, including Trotskyists and Communists. The Irish Republican Army had also been infiltrated by Communists in recent years.

The Home Secretary proposed to mention to Major Chichester-Clark the possibility of a round-table conference being held. He would not put this forward as a positive proposal at this stage, although he himself was in favour of such a conference.

He had just received a telephone request from the Northern Ireland Government for the use of troops to guard the Belfast Harbour Estate which included parts of Messrs. Harland and Wolff's shipyard and various public utilities. He had arranged for the Northern Ireland Government to be informed that he did not understand why troops were needed for this purpose, at a time
when the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) should be under less strain; it was not clear why the "B" Specials could not be used for this task; and he was doubtful of the wisdom of meeting the request. He had asked the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland, for his views and for an appreciation of the situation.

In discussion it was suggested that it would be helpful to the Cabinet to have an objective analysis of the political situation and of the basic social factors in Northern Ireland of the kind that our Ambassadors abroad regularly provided. The Government lacked the information on which to judge the complaints of political and economic discrimination; and they had no expert knowledge available on the internal problems which would arise from direct rule and no adequate means of assessing the tasks involved. The Home Office kept closely in touch with Northern Ireland affairs, however, and had access to the kind of sources on which our Ambassadors relied for their reports. The Home Office was in particularly close touch with the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the RUC had recently been strengthened by the secondment of British security personnel. It might be possible for the Home Office to produce an appreciation, or a series of situation reports, on the lines suggested from information which it already received, although more staff would be required. There would still be a lack of independent and up-to-date reports on the political situation, prepared on the spot, but the Northern Ireland Government would resent political representatives of the United Kingdom Government being sent there. It would be helpful if the Home Secretary would consider this general problem further and inform the Cabinet of his views. It would also be helpful if the Home Secretary would circulate to the Cabinet a brief paper on the question whether the Stormont Parliament was fairly elected and on complaints of gerrymandering of constituency boundaries. Although there were numerous complaints on the local government franchise in Northern Ireland, there appeared to be no serious suggestion that the Parliament was not genuinely representative. There was an independent Boundary Commission in Northern Ireland operating under the same rules as the boundary commissions for the United Kingdom Parliament.

In discussion of the planning hypotheses set out in paragraph 23 of C (69) 45, it was suggested that the difficulties of direct rule, which would probably have to be imposed against the wishes of the majority of the population, would be very great. Reforms imposed by the United Kingdom Government would be bitterly resented by both Catholics and Protestants. The United Kingdom Government could not allow complete anarchy in Northern Ireland. But if troops had to be used on a large scale to preserve law and order, there would be a choice between direct rule and using troops in
support of the Northern Ireland Government; if it was to be the latter, the Northern Ireland Government must have a defensible policy which the United Kingdom Government could support. The Cabinet would need to consider the various planning hypotheses in greater detail later. It would be important to ensure that the use of troops was not automatically extended in response to events without the necessary decisions of principle being taken in full awareness of their implications. The use of troops in sporadic disturbances of a relatively minor character might well tend to lead progressively to the use of troops in more serious disorders, ending in full military intervention.

The Prime Minister, summing up the discussion, said that the Cabinet endorsed the Home Secretary's provisional decision with regard to the use of troops to guard the Belfast Harbour Estate although it would be open to the Home Secretary to bring the issue before Ministers again if he wished. The Home Secretary should consider the provision of a political and social analysis of the Northern Ireland situation, on the lines indicated in discussion, and should circulate a paper setting out his views on how this might be done. He should also circulate a paper on the extent to which the Stormont Parliament could be regarded as genuinely representative of the electorate.

It had been suggested in some quarters that the United Kingdom Government should wash its hands of Northern Ireland affairs, but it was clear that this would not be a defensible policy.

The Cabinet generally endorsed the approach set out in paragraphs 27-32 of C (69) 45 and agreed that the possibility of a round-table conference should be held in reserve; such a conference might be unnecessary if the situation remained quiet but might be required urgently if serious rioting broke out again. The Cabinet should resume its consideration of the Northern Ireland situation after the visit of Major Chichester-Clark to London. The question of consulting the Opposition on the planning hypotheses should then be considered further: it would certainly be out of the question to
impose direct rule without such consultation. The Group of Ministers (MISC 238), which had been formed to consider the Northern Ireland situation, should be authorised to deal with issues arising at short notice in the meantime, submitting to the Cabinet any issues which required Cabinet decision. It might be necessary, for example at weekends, for decisions in a critical emergency to be taken by the Ministers most closely concerned (himself, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Defence Secretary).

The Cabinet—

(1) Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.

(2) Invited the Home Secretary to circulate to the Cabinet, papers—

(i) on the provision of an intelligence appreciation including a political and social analysis of the situation in Northern Ireland, on the lines indicated in discussion;

(ii) on the extent to which the Stormont Parliament was genuinely representative of the electorate.

(4) Authorised MISC 238 and, if necessary, a smaller group of Ministers most closely concerned to take action on urgent matters on which it was impracticable to consult the Cabinet.

3. The Prime Minister said that he and the First Secretary would be seeing representatives of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) on 12th May. The purpose of the meeting would be to find out whether the TUC had any alternative proposals to make for dealing with unofficial strikes which would be as effective as the Government's proposal for a conciliation pause. It seemed unlikely that the TUC would have any practical suggestions to put forward but it was important that they should be given every encouragement and opportunity to do so. There were indications that opposition within the Parliamentary Labour Party to the use of statutory powers would be reduced if it became clear that the TUC had no practical proposals for dealing with unofficial strikes in other ways.
In discussion the point was made that many trade union leaders were anxious to make a constructive contribution towards the solution of the problem of unofficial strikes and that it would be unwise to press for an immediate answer to the Government’s request for alternative proposals. On the other hand it was argued that the TUC showed no sense of urgency in dealing with the problem and there was no evidence that they would, if given more time, be able to propose any practical and effective alternative to the conciliation pause.

*The Prime Minister*, summing up the discussion, said that the Cabinet would be able to have a full discussion on the proposed legislation on industrial relations, taking account of the outcome of the discussion with the TUC on 12th May, at their meeting in the following week.

The Cabinet—

Took note of the statement by the Prime Minister.

*Cabinet Office, S.W.1,*

8th May, 1969.