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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR A POLITICAL STRIKE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Douglas Hurd sent me a copy of his minute of 28th August to the Prime Minister.

2. Although the Government's response to any action of the sort he described must primarily be on the political level, it is, of course, sensible to prepare for the possible need to implement this Department's Military Aid to the Civil Ministries' plans

3. We have a number of such plans, tailored to Northern Ireland, to help cover the eventualities to which Douglas referred, such as strikes in the electricity service, water and sewage services, the fire service, the docks, the fuel supply industry and the prisons. Most of these plans imply a requirement for reinforcement from outside the Province. I am satisfied that sufficient servicemen with the required skills and trades could be made available to meet the plans although it might be necessary to bring some people back from outside the United Kingdom.



4. There would, of course, be some penalty to other defence commitments which we would need to look at in more detail at the time, although I would accept, of course, that these are unlikely to be as significant as the political imperative of maintaining order and essential services in Northern Ireland.

5. But I should like to comment on the suggestion that, as part of the plan for the prisons, we might consider putting soldiers in direct contact with prisoners. I remain very uneasy about this, not only for its obvious political sensitivity, but also because our soldiers are simply not trained in this sort of work. While it might need to be considered in extremis, I would hope that all other options, including perhaps the use of prison or police manpower from Great Britain, would be exhausted first.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to the Prime Minister, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Secretaries of State for Employment and Energy; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Wey
Ministry of Defence
5th September 1985

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