

EP

14th December 1981

NORTHERN IRELAND BOUNDARY COMMISSION

I send to you, in confidence, a copy of a letter dated 7th December, which I have received from Jim Prior.

Do please have a word about this, if you would like to do so.

IAN GOW

The Rt Hon J Enoch Powell MBE MP

Prime Minister

NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUENCIES

1. As you know, the decision taken in the last Parliament, to increase from 12 - 17 the number of Northern Ireland constituencies was viewed without favour in Dublin, and with favour by those who believe in the Union.
2. There is a suspicion (wholly unfounded) in Enoch's mind, that the Government is seeking to postpone, or even abandon, the proposal to increase the number of constituencies.
3. I wrote to Jim Prior about this. Herewith Jim's reply of yesterday's date.
4. I think that Jim's reply is perfectly reasonable and satisfactory. Because I am anxious to allay Enoch's fears, may I please send him a copy of Jim's letter, on "Privy Councillor" terms, and on the basis that it is for Enoch's private and confidential information only?

Yes mt

8th December 1981

JSG

pp IAN GOW



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Ian Gow Esq MP
Parliamentary Private
Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

7 December 1981

Thank you for your letter of 10 November about the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission's work. I gather that there may be some fear that the Commission's Report might be being held back - perhaps to keep in step with England, Wales and Scotland.

As you know, the Commission is strictly the Speaker's creature, although my Department services it. I have to be careful therefore not to associate myself with its work before it is completed, particularly so in the heightened political atmosphere of Northern Ireland. However, I understand the present position to be that the Commission is finalising its recommendations on parliamentary constituencies and will then proceed to the second part of its statutory role - to review the hypothetical, for the time being, distribution of Northern Ireland Assembly seats. So far, in answer to Parliamentary Questions, the Government has said that, in line with England and Wales and Scotland, the Northern Ireland Report is expected by the end of 1982. But I am given to believe that, barring unexpected difficulties, the Northern Ireland Report could be available rather earlier, perhaps in the Spring. Once it is available then you will know that I am required to lay it before Parliament "as soon as may be" together with a draft of any necessary amending legislation to give effect to its recommendations, if acceptable.

I see no reason why we should not reassure our colleagues and supporters privately that the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission is making good progress; that its Report should be available in the first half of next year; and that the necessary legislation to give effect to its recommendations will be laid well before the likely date of the next general election. In public, however, I am sure that it is right for me to continue to distance myself from the Commission and, in response to questions, to maintain the line that the Report is expected in the course of 1982.