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SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

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Your letter of 16 September asked all Ministers in charge of Departments to prepare a report giving a forward look at the Department's programmes for the next 5 years. I attach a report I have prepared giving such a forward look at the programmes envisaged for Northern Ireland.

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FORWARD LOOK

Introduction

The broad strategy for Northern Ireland during the next five years will be to continue the policies to which we have been committed during the present Parliament. Our approach is based on a recognition of the interdependence of the three dominant issues affecting the Province - security, the economy and the political stalemate of recent years.

The essentials of our strategy (discussed in more detail below) will be:-

- (i) To give the highest priority to the restoration of law and order, building upon the growing success of the security forces over the years in reducing terrorism.
- (ii) To establish the clear role which exists under direct rule for the Northern Ireland Assembly to scrutinise and influence the work of the Northern Ireland Departments and to debate issues affecting the Province; and to foster acceptance of the Assembly by both sides of the community with a view to an eventual move towards proposals for devolution under the Northern Ireland Act 1982.
- (iii) To take all practicable measures to reverse the economic decline of the Province; to continue the improvements achieved in the social environment; and to show that our policies deal evenhandedly with both sides of the community.

Security

We shall seek to continue to extend the role of the police, reducing the troop level (as security permits) towards normal garrison, proportions. For this purpose the RUC will be expanded to give a total

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force/....



force (including Reservists) of 10,500 by mid-1984.

We are about to review the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 to determine whether its provision achieve the right balance between the liberties of the individual and the provision of adequate powers to enable the security forces to protect the public from terrorist crime. This might require legislation in the next Parliament.

We shall seek to maintain the closer cross-border co-operation with the Republic's security forces which has brought significant successes in recent years; and we shall continue our endeavours on extradition to ensure that terrorists committing offences in the Province do not evade the law by taking refuge in another country.

Constitutional and Political Developments

Our policies have and will continue to give recognition to the deeply held conviction amongst all the main Northern Ireland parties in favour of a resumption of devolved government. We have therefore created a framework which provides for a devolved administration if Assembly members can agree on arrangements which secure cross-community support.

That agreement will not be reached easily or quickly: and the prospects of it are unlikely to be advanced until the constitutional representatives of the minority community take their place in the Assembly. It may be, therefore, that direct rule from Westminster for all aspects of the administration of Northern Ireland will have to continue well into the life of the next Parliament. The need during that period will be to demonstrate to both communities in the Province that the Assembly has an important and effective role in scrutinising the operation of direct rule, and so to encourage all elected representatives who wish to pursue their aspirations through constitutional politics to participate fully in its work.

We could hold a border poll at any time from 1983 onwards, but we have said that there is no intention to hold one in the immediate future.



We shall continue to seek better relations with the Republic, building on the achievements which led to the 1981 Summit with Dr FitzGerald's previous administration, working through the Anglo-Irish Governmental Council, and also seeking closer economic co-operation between the Province and the Republic.

Economic and Social Matters

The Province faces a range of economic, social and environmental problems which make it uniquely disadvantageous among the regions of the United Kingdom. There is little prospect in the foreseeable future of any real recovery in employment. This has important social, security and other implications.

Our attention will focus on measures to alleviate these problems and in particular on measures to stimulate industrial development. The newly constituted Industrial Development Board will be playing an important part in the creation and maintenance of employment in industry.

The Youth Training Programme, which is already in operation offering a wide range of provision including a guaranteed year of training for 16 year olds, will develop towards complete coverage of the age group so that all young people aged 16 and 17 will be either at school, in work (including training) or, if they wish, on a Youth Training Programme scheme.

There will also be changes in the structure of higher education to introduce co-ordinated and complementary provision through Queen's University and a new University to replace NUU and the Polytechnic. There will be substantial progress in improving housing conditions in Northern Ireland, particularly in the City of Belfast - a reduction of unfitness by 1% of the total stock per year (from its 1979 level of 14%) and a reduction of the NIHE urgent waiting list of one third by 1986-87.

On energy, there should be further efforts to explore for indigenous resources in Northern Ireland; and there will also be a decision about the exploitation of the important reserves of lignite now identified

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in County Antrim, further steps towards a reduction in Northern Ireland's undue dependence upon the use of oil for electricity generation, and subject to completion of the necessary agreements, the piping of Kinsale Gas into Northern Ireland.

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