



PRIME MINISTER

1. HERewith HAM SAND FOR 1st APRIL.
2. MAY I DRAW YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE, TO THE QUESTIONS POSED BY:-
 - (a) JOHN BULL. DAVISON - COLUMN 443
 - (b) RICHARD BODY - COLUMN 444
 - (c) IVOR STABROOK - COLUMN 445
3. THIS HAS CREATED GRAVE DISQUIET AMONG OUR BACK BENCHES; AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE THOUGHT, FOR A LONG TIME, THAT TOO MUCH IS SAID BY YOUR OFFICE, TO THE PRESS,
4. HERewith ARTICLE FROM TO-DAY'S GUARDIAN ON THE SUBJECT OF NORTHERN IRELAND.
5. I PROTESTED TO BERNARD IN CHAM ABOUT THIS, {IE ABOUT THE LAST THREE PARAGRAPHS.
6. HE SAID THAT HE HAD TOLD THE LOBBY THAT "I DO NOT KNOW WHAT A: FOR IS



UP TO" I EXPLAINED TO HIM THAT THAT
REPLY MEANT THAT "I WAS UP TO SOMETHING"

7. THIS IS DEEPLY DAMAGING TO YOU (WHICH DOES MATTER)
AND TO ME (WHICH DOES NOT)

8. I WENT TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE
LAST EVENING. THE FOLLOWING SPOKE AGAINST JIM'S
PLANS:-

JOHN BILLY - DAVIDSON

PHILIP COOHAERT

GARRY PORTER

IVOR STANBROOK

RICHARD BOOT

JULIAN AMERY

MICHAEL BROWN

JOHN BROWNNE

9. THE DYE IS NOW CAST, BUT YOU UNDERSTAND, AND
THANK YOU FOR UNDERSTANDING, HOW DIFFICULT MY
POSITION IS. I CANNOT FORGET AIREY.

10. WHEN YOU HAVE A MOMENT, MAY WE PLEASE HAVE
A WORD?

11. FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, I AM NOT DICTATING THIS (NOTE.
Jan 24/1972)

Cabinet backs Prior reforms for Ulster

By Julia Langdon,
Political Correspondent

The Cabinet yesterday approved Mr James Prior's plans for a new attempt to devolve power to Northern Ireland, but he immediately encountered serious criticism from some backbench Conservative MPs.

The Northern Ireland Secretary is to make a statement in the Commons on Monday, when it is expected that the White Paper setting out his proposals will be published, subject only to the exigencies of printing. What is less certain is the timing of the publication of the proposed bill.

This may also be produced next week, possibly on Wednesday or Thursday, but because

Ulster prison transfers ruled out, page 4.

of the opposition in the Tory party, the Government may first await a vote on the White Paper.

One of the main sources of criticism aimed at Mr Prior yesterday was his failure to consult Tory MPs sufficiently before pressing his plans.

Mr Prior won an overwhelming majority from Ministers, however, with an eloquent defence of the need for action on the grounds of the economic devastation in the province.

He also laid out for his colleagues the importance of giving power to local representatives in Northern Ireland before the memory of the responsibility involved in exercising power was forgotten.

It is still the Government's intention to go ahead with the

bill, which it is planned should complete its parliamentary process before the summer recess. It is a very short piece of legislation, with only about five substantive clauses, and its principal purpose is the amendment of existing legislation to enable elections to be held.

Among its proposals is also a formula to override the possibility that the Unionists could wreck the planned assembly.

Mr Prior is understood to have suggested that if any particular matter is held to have "cross-community" backing but might not win support in the assembly even with a weighted majority, the Secretary of State should use his authority.

It is proposed that the minister would be obliged to put an Order before the House of Commons to give effect to the proposal, although in such circumstances the Government would not be under any obligation as to its own commitment.

Mr Prior will also attempt to reduce opposition in Ulster to the effective operation of the assembly, once elected, by establishing a relatively large number of paid posts.

He is expected to propose that 18 of the 78 members of the assembly should occupy salaried positions as chairmen or deputies of committees.

At the Northern Ireland committee of Tory MPs last night there was outspoken criticism of the plan. A majority of the 15 to 20 members present expressed their doubts about proceedings and it was suggested that Mr Prior would be forced to concede defeat.

The legislation, because of its constitutional nature, will be

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Cabinet backs Ulster reform

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taken on the floor of the Commons and it is already clear that some Conservative backbenchers will vote against it.

It was being suggested in some quarters that Mr Prior would find himself unable to proceed because of Conservative opposition, coupled with

the doubts among all political parties in the North.

One factor which has confused Tory MPs in recent weeks is the role of the Prime Minister's parliamentary private secretary, Mr Ian Gow, who has made no secret of his personal opposition

This has aroused speculation

among Tory MPs, although official sources have discounted the possibility that Mr Gow's views are a reflection of the Prime Minister's.

It was suggested yesterday by Whitehall sources that Mr Gow had attempted "to poison" the Prime Minister's reaction to Mr Prior.