


Eamon Phoenix reviews the CABINET PAPERS

Westminster



Bloody Friday was the final straw that led to Motorman

THE new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw was keen to adopt a cautious policy towards the 'no-go' areas in Derry, according to this year's London releases.

At a meeting on April 14, 1972, attended by Defence Secretary Lord Carrington, Chief of the General Staff General Carver and army GOC General Tuzo, Whitelaw said that the security authorities in Northern Ireland were concerned about the new low-profile security policy. In particular, there were fears that the morale of the RUC Special Branch might suffer. However, he felt it was necessary to walk a tightrope between getting the necessary intelligence and not alienating moderate Catholic opinion. He said it was important to keep up a steady release of internees and added that he was not convinced that there had been strong grounds for internment in many of the cases he had examined.

Lord Carrington said he was worried by suggestions that the situation in the 'no-go' areas had become worse since direct rule and by reports that 'Free Derry' would become a permanency. He felt that the government would be politically vulnerable if they allowed this to happen.

Mr Whitelaw commented that former unionist prime minister Brian Faulkner had chosen to launch an attack on the 'no-go' areas. It was essential that such areas should not be allowed to develop in Belfast. He said the Bogside and Creggan "had not been properly policed for years, even before 1969. For the army to go into the Bogside and Creggan in force would lead to large scale civilian casualties." Such an operation would be likely to have a serious impact on public opinion at home and abroad and to prejudice their Northern Ireland policies generally. Mr Whitelaw believed that "the Londonderry problem would have to be left till last and the solution must be found by political rather than military means".

The events of 'Bloody Friday', in Belfast on July 21 1972 convinced the Heath government that the timing was right for the final assault on the 'no-go' areas in Derry.

At a British cabinet meeting in Downing Street on July 27 1972, Secretary of State William Whitelaw thought it unrealistic to rely on any lasting renewal of the recent ceasefire by the IRA. At the same time he believed that a continuation of military operations at the present level would merely stimulate further feelings of frustration within the Protestant community and irritation among Catholics.

Reviewing the events of 'Bloody Friday', ministers believed that the climate of public opinion, while the atrocity of July 21 was still fresh, provided an opportunity for the government to take action to show that it could no longer tolerate the existence of barricaded areas to which the security forces had only limited access. The Bogside and Creggan areas of Derry were of particular symbolic importance in this connection.

However, if militarily feasible, simultaneous action should also be directed against areas in Belfast similarly dominated by extremists, whether of the IRA or the UDA.

It was accepted that the success of the operation would depend greatly on keeping casualties to a minimum. There were also fears that the IRA would persuade or compel large crowds to take to the streets and greatly increase the risk of casualties.

The meeting was told that forces involved must be fully instructed regarding the importance of maintaining standards of discipline and employing only the minimum force. These principles must apply to the interrogation of suspects – of whom considerable numbers might be arrested. The operation should consist of rapid and simultaneous penetration into the several areas concerned, in order to inflict maximum damage upon the capability of the IRA to wage its campaign while keeping to a minimum the risk of casualties to persons other than terrorists.

At a further meeting on August 3 1972, Mr Heath informed his cabinet that 'Operation Motorman' had been launched at 4am on Monday July 31, and had rapidly achieved a complete reoccupation of the areas concerned.

At a meeting between Mr Heath and Taoiseach Jack Lynch in Munich on September 4 1972, the Taoiseach generally approved of 'Operation Motorman' and British moves towards convening a



■ SCENE OF CARNAGE: Glengall Street bus station on Bloody Friday

conference of the northern parties.

Mr Heath asked if the IRA chief of staff, Sean Mac Stiofain, could be arrested but Mr Lynch said that he had disappeared and that the evidence against him was flimsy. The Taoiseach also claimed that the RUC "had not been purged of Protestant bigots".

Mr Heath said that proposal for a border poll would go ahead when legislation was prepared, however, Lynch was against it, arguing that Catholics might boycott it.

The introduction of plastic baton rounds in the north in May 1972 was the subject of a confidential memo from the Ministry of Defence to Mr Whitelaw.

The memo informed Mr Whitelaw that the rubber baton round, although useful in dealing with hooligans and rioters, "becomes increasingly ineffective at ranges of over 35 metres; indeed hooligans have on occasion caught rubber bullets in flight. A plastic (PBC) round has been developed by C D E Porton and has proved to be significantly more accurate than the rubber round". It was accepted that "with the increase in capability over the rubber round at all ranges, there is a corresponding increase in the risk of causing serious injury or death at shorter ranges".

The defence secretary, Lord Carrington, agreed that the use of the plastic bullet must be subject to the strictest conditions and controls. However, he added: "The current threats by both communities in Northern Ireland to attempt to set up new 'no-go' areas and the forthcoming marching season, face us with a distinct possibility of serious riots during the coming weeks and I believe that the PBC round will strengthen significantly the army's ability to handle that situation."

The British cabinet by August 1972 was moving towards the concept of non-jury Diplock courts, formerly instituted at the end of the year.

Mr Whitelaw, informed the cabinet that "although casualties among our own troops remain regrettably high, our various measures to erode the strength of the IRA are re continuing to

meet with significant success". There were difficulties, however, with regards to those who were held in internment or in detention. In terms of security they could afford to release only some, but it was questionable whether they could detain the rest indefinitely without bringing them to trial.

Mr Whitelaw continued: "We face an equally serious problem as regards those members of the IRA who are still at large. Although we are morally certain in many cases that they were guilty of perpetrating or organising outrages against our troops, it would often be impossible to disclose in any normal court of law the evidence which we obtained through intelligence sources to justify our contention".

A review under the prime minister's chairmanship concluded that they must adopt some kind of quasi-judicial procedure. This would enable a detained individual to be examined in conditions approximating to a trial, even though much of the hearings would have to be conducted in camera and it would not be possible in many cases to reveal the sources of evidence.

The Republic's government made strong representation to Britain in

May 1972 on the continuation of 'torture' at holding centres in the North.

On May 3 1972, Sean Donlon, of the Department of Foreign Affairs, told British officials that "in contrast with an improving political situation, he had found evidence of the most sickening police brutality he had yet seen". He said he had collected evidence of 13 recent cases in which men were beaten with great severity, especially around the genitals. The evidence included medical testimony and personal affidavits. Beatings had occurred in five different locations in the north while John Hume was gathering similar evidence in Derry.

In all cases, the RUC did the beating but British army personnel were often present in the room. Donlon said that the occurrence in so many places in recent days seemed to indicate overall coordination, although he did not believe that Mr Whitelaw could have been aware of what was happening.

Mr Donlon's concerns worried British officials, as a note on the file shows: "Like Donlon, we cannot explain these reported incidents. One obvious possibility would be that they are a deliberate attempt to torpedo Whitelaw's

progress." The allegations formed the agenda of a meeting between the secretary of state and the RUC chief constable, Sir Graham Shillington, two days later. At the meeting, Whitelaw expressed concern at the time taken to deal with allegations of ill-treatment.

The archives reveal tensions between the Republic's foreign minister Dr Patrick Hillery and the SDLP over its entry into talks with the British government.

In an undated memo, the British ambassador to Dublin, Sir John Peck, told Whitehall officials that Dr Hillery had told him that "the time had come when the SDLP should be induced to get off their high horse about internment and to get down to talks, if not with Mr Whitelaw, at least with his officials." The Dublin minister hastened to add that the Irish government had no form of control over the SDLP. Paddy Devlin (the MP for Falls at Stormont), for example, "hated Lynch's guts".

The British government considered a drastic repartition of Northern Ireland and possible forced movements of population in July 1972.

The repartition scheme was one of several "worse case contingencies" drawn up by the cabinet office at the behest of ministers in the wake of 'Bloody Friday' and just before 'Operation Motorman' in Derry. The report's authors repeatedly doubted if such a drastic policy would improve matters.

In the report, marked 'Top Secret', the government advisers said they had been asked "to consider whether it would be practicable to move the dissident republican population out of Northern Ireland, retaining only the unionist population". They acknowledged that although republicanism was often equated with Catholicism "the two terms by no means cover the same ground. Many Catholics prefer the union with Great Britain and many more feel only an emotional attraction to the Republican ideal".

The report suggested the population transfer could be achieved by, either moving areas which contain a Catholic majority to the Republic or moving individual Catholics from their homes in the north to new homes in the 26-counties; or a combination of these.

In considering the transfer of territory, priority would be given to "hiving off those areas with a simple Catholic majority at the most recent census". However, such a scheme would have a number of flaws. It would create enclaves of republican territory within Northern Ireland and unionist enclaves in the Republic and would transfer nearly as many Protestants as Catholics. In addition, it would ignore the much larger Catholic population (284,000) who lived in local authority areas where they were not a majority. Also, the 114,000 Catholics in Belfast formed a fairly cohesive enclave, but it could not be linked to other Catholic areas without including considerable Protestant areas. The authors accepted that the seeding of part of the UK would raise political difficulties.

"Assuming it were undertaken in conjunction with a land transfer (the Republic would surely not accept half a million Catholics without land for them to live on), there would be a need to remove 200,000-300,000 Catholics from other parts of Northern Ireland into the seeded areas; and to bring up 200,000 Protestants out of the seeded areas into the remainder of Northern Ireland. About one third of the population of Northern Ireland would be on the move. Such a massive movement would not be peacefully accomplished; great resistance could be expected from many of those who should move." The Catholics would face initial homelessness and unemployment and reduced social services, and all would face prolonged uncertainty and upheaval. Protestants would see the need to move as a poor reward for their "loyalty to the Crown".

The authors concluded that such induced movement would contravene the European convention on human rights while there was no reason to suppose that it would change the IRA's attitude to partition. In the South, opposition would be vehement and universal and would lead to the replacement of the Lynch government by a more hawkish regime. It was, therefore, extremely doubtful whether a transfer of territory or population could be effectively accomplished. An accompanying map showed the reduction of Northern Ireland to a three-and-a-half county enclave.



■ TOP SECRET: British government plans to redraw the border in 1972