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Reference Code: 2003/17/271

Title: Transcript of questions put to the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, and his answers thereunto concerning the events of 'Bloody Sunday', 30 January 1972, in Derry, and recall of the Irish Ambassador from London.

Creation Date(s): 31 January, 1972

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 1 page

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Access Conditions: Open

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Questions put to the Taoiseach outside Government
Buildings on 31st January 1972

Q. Prime Minister, when you say you are recalling your Ambassador does this mean you are breaking off diplomatic relations.

A. No, it does not. It is an indication that we regard the matter as very serious. The Ambassador will be brought home. He will have consultations. The Embassy, of course, will continue to be there and will be fully serviced.

Q. Can you say what you said to Mr. Heath last night and what he replied to you.

A. I told Mr. Heath last night that the situation had now reached a very critical point and that at this stage it required him to take the firm political action that we have been advocating for so long and that political action, of course, referred to the internment issue, the responsibility for security forces and the continued existence of Stormont in its present form. He did not respond favourably.

Q. Can you say exactly what he said.

A. I would not like to say exactly what he said. It was a telephone conversation and I don't think it is proper that one should give details of these conversations.

Q. Will the recall of our Ambassador from London be of a temporary nature or will it be for as long as the British fail to take the initiatives that you have suggested.

A. It will be of a temporary nature and naturally the duration will relate to the action that the British Government will take on the problems that will now be put to them.

Q. Are the deaths in Derry yesterday going to make settlement more difficult.

A. It makes settlement certainly more urgent and I think these deaths now will bring the urgency of that situation home to everybody concerned and I hope especially to the British Government. We don't want to see a continuation or a recurrence of this kind of happening that was witnessed yesterday in Derry.

Q. From the reports that you received this morning and which you considered at the Cabinet meeting on what happened in Derry yesterday who have you been told fired first.

A. I have been told without question whatever that no shots were fired until some minutes after the paratroopers opened fire and let many see now that it is now known that officers of two British army units in Belfast asked earlier this week that the paratroop units be withdrawn because they described the manner in which they were dealing with the minority population as brutal and that they were destroying whatever good relations that the existing British army units had built up; that they destroyed in ten minutes what it took these other units four weeks to build up.

Q. Is there any way though in which you can be absolutely 100 per cent certain that it was the British army who fired first.

A. I am satisfied from the evidence I have received but I would be quite willing in fact I will urge a form of international enquiry into this whole situation and then I think the facts will be exposed.