

CONFIDENTIAL.



25th November, 1968.

MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS.

Having been giving considerable thought to the unrest existing in Northern Ireland at present, which seems likely to continue until electoral reform is introduced, I feel I should commit to writing the more important and serious features which appear evident to me, so that consideration may be given, at the highest level, to the kind of action necessary to cope with the situation.

I would emphasise that the present trouble could become much more serious than that created between 1956 and 1962 by the I.R.A. During that period it was largely a battle between the police and the I.R.A. and fortunately the ordinary citizens did not become involved. Thus the scope of activities was confined, and actually there was very little public disorder or anything in the nature of a real menace to the day to day life of the community. The position to-day is fraught with more danger, because, in my opinion, a number of people on what I may call the loyalist side are confused and are not making any distinction between the I.R.A. and Civil Rights marchers and those belonging to similar organisations. This is resulting in opposition to peaceful marches, demonstrations and meetings, of such a nature as could lead to armed conflict, with the I.R.A. stepping in to take advantage of the situation to exploit their aims and objects. It is unnecessary to comment at any length on the effects of such a conflict, but it must be pointed out that death and destruction would be inevitable and the impact on the whole way of life in Ulster would be catastrophic.

It seems to me that enough is not being done by responsible people who should, I suggest, be busy pointing out the differences between the two kinds of activity I have mentioned, and stirring themselves to call for a better understanding, especially in regard to interference with those who, peacefully, are stating their grievances publicly. If it could be proclaimed that the old bogey of partition plays no part in the present agitation (and this is how I see it) and that the constitution is not in any danger from those who are protesting, I feel that a great deal of heat will disappear. In other words, if the "Orange v. Green" atmosphere could be dissipated a happier state of affairs should emerge. Not only should this be done in public by responsible people, but every endeavour should be made behind the scenes to educate those who are apprehensive, pointing out the realities of the situation. Police information indicates that many professing Unionists support the protesters, and the trouble emanates from a comparatively small minority of people holding extremist views who, quite sincerely I feel, see a danger to the constitution which, as I have said above, does not exist.

I would also suggest, very earnestly, that people holding important public positions should carefully refrain from making public statements which are, perhaps quite unintentionally, calculated to inflame passions. Also, I should say here that appeals for calm and restraint, many of which have been made recently, will not have the desired effect unless they are accompanied by the kind of explanation I have already mentioned.

Unless/

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Unless there is a marked change in the situation soon I am afraid that the small police force we have in Ulster will be up against a problem of maintaining law and order unprecedented in the history of the Province, and one which they may find quite impossible to cope with successfully.

One could elaborate on what I have said, but I consider this unnecessary as the dangers must be evident to anyone who is giving the matter any degree of thought.

I hope that this minute will be considered in the spirit in which it is written, that it will not be thought to be presumptuous or alarmist, and that when elaborating on the Government's recently announced programme of social and political reforms spokesmen might take into consideration the points I have made and emphasise them.

Inspector General.