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Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet
Security Committee held in Stormont Castle
on Thursday, 31st July, 1969, at 2.30 p.m.

PRESENT: The Minister in the Senate
 The Minister of Home Affairs
 The Minister of Education
 The Minister of Development

ALSO PRESENT: The Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet

 Mr. H. Coote

Restrictions on the Use of C.S. Smoke

*Extract
on S.M.
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The Minister of Home Affairs referred to the events in Londonderry on the night of 12th/13th July and said that because of the seriousness of the situation County Inspector Corbett had requested permission to use gas. He had not acceded to his request, however, as the police were not equipped with suitable respirators and, in any event, were untrained in the use of gas. The position was, therefore, that if gas was to be used at all the Army would have to do so. He had discussed the position with Brigadier Dyball and it was agreed not to authorise gas unless the emergency became greater. Fortunately the situation had eased and a decision had not to be taken but the Minister expressed his concern that the police had merely succeeded in containing the situation; they had by no means been in control of it. Talks which he had had with Commander Anderson and Mr. Robin Chichester-Clark confirmed this view. The rioters were, in fact, dictating the pattern and the situation was one which could not be allowed to continue. The next morning (Sunday) following consultations with the Inspector-General and the Ulster Special Constabulary, he had decided to alert sections of the U.S.C., who would be equipped with batons only, for stand-by duty with the R.U.C. Brigadier Dyball had also been asked to have the Army available as a precaution. Later in the day limited approval (since extended) to the use of C.S. smoke by the R.U.C. had been given by the Home Office but only in circumstances where the use of firearms by the R.U.C. or the calling in of the Army were the only alternatives. On the Sunday night the situation deteriorated fairly rapidly and County Inspector Corbett made a fresh request for gas, but following an assessment of the position by an Army Colonel the use of gas was not thought to be justified. Once again, however, the police had done nothing more than contain the situation. The rioters were, in effect, able to do as they pleased. The Minister said that he now considered the second of the Home Secretary's conditions for the use of C.S. too restrictive in that it was tantamount to the police having to admit that they had lost complete control of the situation. In Londonderry they had only lost control in a limited sense and there was no question of Army intervention. In his view there was a case for the use of C.S. smoke in

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Londonderry on 12th and 13th July even though military intervention would not have been justified and he considered that there were convincing arguments for an extension of the conditions to cover the situation where the available forces of the R.U.C. were otherwise unable to prevent serious damage to property, etc., and to effect arrests. Brigadier Dyball, with whom he had discussed the matter, concurred in this view. The Minister said that he himself had experienced the effects of C.S. smoke and, whilst he was incapable of action for a time, he had suffered no ill effects. He emphasised that he could, in no circumstances, countenance a repeat performance in Londonderry on 12th August and there was, in his view, a strong case for modification of the conditions laid down by the Home Office. Following discussion of the matter, it was agreed that an approach be made to Whitehall with a view to the use of C.S. by the police in circumstances where their available forces were otherwise unable 1. to prevent serious damage to property or injury to persons, or 2. to arrest rioters in sufficient numbers to bring the riot conditions to an end. The Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet said that it was clear from soundings he had taken that an official approach on this issue was unlikely to be effective and that any contact would have to be made at Ministerial level. It was also likely that the approach would have to be to Mr. Harold Wilson as the Home Secretary was understood to be on holiday. The Minister of Education suggested that the Minister of Home Affairs might team up with the Prime Minister in London on his way home from holiday but it was thought that an arrangement of this kind would undoubtedly give rise to speculation. It was finally agreed that the Minister of Home Affairs should discuss the matter with the Prime Minister at the weekend and that, in the meantime, the Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet should warn the Home Office that the matter was being raised at Ministerial level.

Possible Statement on Restrictions

In referring to the Home Office's letter of 22nd July, which said that if Ministers in London had to make a statement on the supply of respirators and C.S. smoke to the R.U.C. they would want to spell out the conditions for the use of C.S., as laid down by the Home Office, the Minister of Home Affairs indicated that he was strongly opposed to such a statement being made for the following reasons -

1. the conclusion would be drawn that the R.U.C. was contemplating the use of firearms against 17/18 year olds;
2. the reference to the calling-in of the Army would give an erroneous impression that the police had lost complete control of the situation.

It was agreed that the making of any such statements by Ministers in London was undesirable and should be resisted.

Minister of Home Affairs' Visit to Ballykinler

The Minister of Home Affairs reported that in arrangement with Brigadier Dyball he had visited Ballykinler for the purpose of testing for himself the

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effects of C.S. smoke, as already mentioned, and of assessing the use of helicopters for crowd control purposes. From the helicopter flight he had undertaken the advantages of this form of control were clearly obvious. Unfortunately, the news of his visit had leaked to the press from some outside source and if details of this had appeared in the newspapers it could well have created a difficult and dangerous situation. The Minister stated that he had succeeded, however, in persuading Mr. Wason of the Belfast Telegraph, the newspaper concerned, not to print the report. Mr. Wason had questioned him about the use of gas in London, but the Minister had said he was unaware of this. Mr. Wason thought that it had been used on one occasion and he (Mr. Wason) undertook to discover the details.

Londonderry - 12th August

In reply to the Minister of Development, who asked whether the Apprentice Boys would be parading round the walls on August 12, the Minister of Home Affairs explained that this march was held in the Waterside and in the City side on alternate years. This year's procession would be held in the City side. The route of the parade was discussed and the Minister of Development suggested that since it would be touching on Nationalist areas consideration might be given to having these areas fenced off. He also considered it vital that the police take the initiative to prevent any confrontation in these areas. The Minister of Home Affairs said he was more concerned at the possibility of trouble following the procession as he understood from Commander Anderson that an underground loyalist group was ready for action at the first opportunity. In so far as the procession was concerned, however, he hoped that there would be a "token" move by the Apprentice Boys to proceed via Upper Clarendon Street to Northland Road rather than via Great James Street, thus avoiding passing St. Eugene's Cathedral and Francis Street, which was 100 per cent Nationalist. The Minister reported that he would be seeing the Chairman of the Londonderry Commission in the course of the next few days about the situation, but general opinion was that these talks were unlikely to prove of any great help in solving the problem.

General

In reply to the Minister in the Senate, the Minister of Home Affairs confirmed that the R.U.C. was now trained in the use of C.S. smoke and that it would be used by Constables under the supervision of the Officer in Control. In reply to the Minister of Development, who was concerned lest the thrower of a C.S. canister should himself suffer the effects of the smoke, due to the wind being in the wrong direction, the Minister of Home Affairs explained that the police, when using C.S. would, of course, be equipped with suitable respirators. He also stated that efforts would be made to ensure that concentration of the smoke, which he appreciated could be extremely ~~dangerous~~ ^{unpleasant} was avoided. The Minister, in reply to a further question by the Minister in the Senate, confirmed that shots from automatic weapons had been fired in Dungiven during the disturbances there and that the matter was under investigation. Mr. Ivan Cooper, M.P., was, in fact, reported to have in his possession FN14 cartridges from an

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automatic weapon. It was possible that 'B' Specials in civilian dress had infiltrated from other areas, but so far as the local force was concerned, he could confirm that they had adhered to instructions not to use firearms. Asking about the free sale of weapons in the shops, the Minister in the Senate said he understood these were being imported into the province in quantity. The Minister of Home Affairs found this difficult to understand, since the purchasers of firearms were required to be in possession of a gun licence from the police and the Minister in the Senate undertook to obtain further particulars. In reply to the Minister of Education, who asked about the reported manufacture of Sten gun copies by, possibly, a loyalist organisation, the Minister of Home Affairs said that he had no information on the matter. The Minister of Education thought that the prime mover in this activity, which was reported to be taking place outside Belfast, was a man by the name of Mitchell.

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