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Northern Ireland Office

Press Notice

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Stormont Castle, Belfast
17 May 1974

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND,
MR MERLYN REES MP

The events of the past few days, in which a number of people have arbitrarily chosen to disrupt the life of the province, and particularly to cause hardship to the old, the very young and the sick, are now creating a situation of utmost gravity. I have a duty to set before you the consequences which may flow from the actions now being taken by some people in the Province. First of all let us be clear: this is not normal industrial action. It is an attempt to persuade or prevent workers, for political purposes, from carrying out a normal day's work.

The effect has been to create a situation in which intimidation has been rife, industry has been prevented from functioning normally, and the most defenceless members of society have been put to severe inconvenience and in some cases danger to health.

Those responsible for the organisation and implementation of this dangerous and coercive campaign must realise that they are acting against the interests of the people they claim to represent. They are also seeking to dictate to Government. I must make it clear that there can be only one government which is responsible to all the people of the United Kingdom through the Parliament at Westminster. The situation is that if it is not possible to maintain output at the power stations, we shall be faced with a total blackout of the Province. If such a situation developed, hospitals would be unable to function, lives would be lost through the lack of operating theatres, food supplies would be curtailed and many other serious consequences would follow.

This is the stark truth which the whole province must face.