

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code: 2001/43/1406

Title: Statement by Mr. James Callaghan, Secretary of State for the Home Department, on disturbances in Northern Ireland and the British Government's response.

Creation Date(s): 22 April, 1969

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 2 pages

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Access Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.



BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES

Economic & Political Affairs Division

April 22, 1969

POLICY STATEMENTS

20/69. NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. James Callaghan, Secretary of State for the Home Department, in the House of Commons on April 21, 1969:

The following brief statement on the weekend disturbances in Northern Ireland and the response of the British Government to the Northern Ireland Government's request for aid was made by the Home Secretary, Mr. James Callaghan, in Parliament on April 21.

"In the early hours of yesterday morning two serious attacks were made on important public utility installations in Northern Ireland. An electricity pylon was damaged by explosion, and trunk water mains were blown up, seriously reducing the supply of water to many thousands of homes. Last evening the Northern Ireland Government requested the assistance of military units stationed in Northern Ireland for the specific purpose of supporting the local police in safeguarding certain key installations essential to the community.

"The British Government immediately authorised the General Officer commanding Northern Ireland to give such assistance, and troops are today being posted to safeguard certain installations in remote areas..."

Mr. Callaghan reminded the House that it had been the Government's intention to resume discussions with the Northern Ireland Government following the recent General Election there, and this had now been agreed.

"... I expect a meeting with the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Captain Terence O'Neill to take place at a very early date."

/Questioned ...

845 Third Avenue, New York, N. Y., 10022, Telephone: 752-8400

This material is filed with the Department of Justice, where the required registration statement of B.I.S. under 56 Stat. 248-258 as an agency of the British Government is available for inspection. Registration does not imply approval of this material by the United States Government.

- 2 -

Questioned about the limitations placed on the actions of the British troops, the Home Secretary said they would remain under the control of their commander.

"As to their role, it is a passive role in the sense that they will be required to safeguard the installations, of which they will be in charge, and to use the minimum amount of force necessary if any attack were made on those installations."

In response to a further question about employment of the troops, Mr. Callaghan said:

"There is no question of their being used actively against any element in Northern Ireland. What they will be required to do will be to repel any criminal or terrorist attack upon installations that are essential to maintain the life of the community..."

Four special reforms on matters that had been the subject of complaint last autumn had already been introduced in Northern Ireland.

"First, there is the machinery for the investigation of grievances. The Bill to establish a Parliamentary Commissioner has been introduced. Secondly, on local authority housing, the new circular has been issued to place the scheme on a readily understood and published basis... A limited reform has been made of the franchise... Finally, the Northern Ireland Government have appointed a Commission of Inquiry into the disturbances last October and since under the chairmanship of Lord Cameron."

Replying to a suggestion that the attacks on the installations were distinct from the civil rights movement, Mr. Callaghan said it was for the police to try to allocate responsibility. He went on,

"The whole House will unite in saying that no constitutional progress can be made against a background of violence. That must apply to all elements in Ireland. It is not for us to preach to them, but I am sure that those in Ireland who wish constitutional progress to be made recognise that it can be made only against a settled and peaceful background."

A later question referred to the prospect of the outbreak of civil war, to which the Home Secretary agreed that the primary aim must clearly be to avert any such prospect. He added,

"I do not think for a moment that that is a probability."

But, order having been maintained,

"... parallel with that we must ensure that proper constitutional progress is made, that grievances are settled, and reforms are introduced."

EF:pc

E N D