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26th May, 1971

Statement issued by the Northern Ireland Information Service on behalf of the Northern Ireland Premier, Mr. Brian Faulkner, concerning the explosion at the Springfield Road RUC Station, 26th May, 1971.

Last night's outrage on the Springfield Road underlines the fact that the terrorist campaign has recently entered a new phase. Thanks to Government policies and the firm handling of riot situations by the Security Forces the subversionists are no longer able successfully to stir up and exploit major street riots. There remains not the slightest shred of legitimate protest, nor of political credibility in the actions of the IRA and similar militant organisations. They stand condemned in the eyes of all the world. This state of affairs is a very real gain not only for the Government but for the entire community and it should not be lost sight of at the present time. But the utter political defeat which the militants have suffered brings with it new dangers, for they have been forced into ever more vicious tactics - sabotage has been superseded by attacks on security personnel and murderous ambushes on Police and Army have been followed by bomb attacks involving the civil population, in a crescendo of destruction.

To combat this latest phase we need not only security action, but the cooperation of the entire community.

As to security action, I had talks with Army and Police chiefs yesterday and I can assure the people of Northern Ireland that the full seriousness of the present position is fully appreciated. The security forces will not be deflected from taking any necessary action by any campaign of criticism mounted against them.

Following my talks I emphasised in the House of Commons last night that the Army stood ready to react at once in any dangerous situation and that there was no delaying constraint upon them to prevent the effective use of their fire power in engagements with armed men. I made the statement for two reasons: first, to reassure the law-abiding population of Northern Ireland that while guerilla warfare, in the nature of things, favours the terrorists, the Army will lose no opportunity of striking hard and fast and second, to warn, not the hard core IRA - for they are past warning - but any misguided dupes on the fringe of terrorism that they could be playing with their lives.

Some people have disingenuously asked what I meant when I said that soldiers would fire on those who were "acting suspiciously". It was clear from the context of my remarks that "acting suspiciously" related to circumstances in which firearms or explosives might be used. The man who carried the bomb which was to bring death, injury and destruction to the Springfield Road last night would, had he been seen in time, have been the sort of target the Army and I had in mind when I made yesterday's statement. The security forces have the support of both the UK and the Northern Ireland Governments in taking whatever measures are necessary to combat this latest wave of terrorism. Whatever the ups and downs of the campaign - and we must accept that there will be ups and downs, just as there were in 1956-62 - the security forces must ultimately win and they will win.

The entire community must see that they have a role to play as well as the Government and the security forces.

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What we are all up against is something which transcends political and religious differences. All decent Ulster men and women have common ground in condemning and helping to combat the criminal murderers who could throw a bomb not caring how many soldiers and policemen and also members of the public and passers by were killed, mutilated and maimed. When we think of the children who were saved only by the bravery and indeed the self-sacrifice of the policemen and soldiers in that terrible explosion, when we think of the two-year-old child blown from its pram and now lying in hospital with a fractured skull surely every family must say "those people could have been our relatives, that baby could have been ours". Surely any normal man or woman, regardless of their standpoint on any other issue, must be utterly disgusted and angered by such sub-human activity. I am glad to see that there has already been widespread condemnation of this latest atrocity; but responsible leaders of the community have a duty not just to condemn it but to take positive steps with those they influence to bring it to an end.

I am confident that the terrorists will fail once again in their bid to have us at one another's throats - decent people everywhere in Northern Ireland must see to it not only that this failure is complete but that every possible assistance is given to the drive to hunt down the killers who are a threat to all of us. We need more information and I believe many people may have vital information which they have so far withheld. Such people should now ask themselves whether they can hold back any longer and risk having on their conscience the deaths and horrible injuries of perhaps their own neighbours and their children.

26th May, 1971