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19 May 1981

The following statement was issued today by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP:

The cowardly murder today of five young men engaged in the business of protecting this community against the calculated violence of terrorist groups is a sad and bitter reminder that those responsible have no concern for the interests of the people of Northern Ireland nor for the ideals so clearly enunciated by that other victim of terrorism, Pope John Paul.

It is a sobering thought that when those responsible for this brutal murder today are apprehended and brought before the courts, as they will be, they may well claim that this crime was committed in pursuit of a political objective. When they are convicted they may well decide to protest before the world that they are entitled to special status within the prison.

I sincerely hope that with the passage of time the enormity of this act will not be forgotten: those young men like many before them who were killed today were acting in support of the civil authority. They did not seek the limelight. They simply did their duty of protecting the community and they do deserve the gratitude and support of the whole of that community.

I deeply regret that in the performance of those duties five brave men should have lost their lives. To their relatives and friends I extend my deepest sympathy. To all of those who may in due course claim that these brutal murders serve any end other than the end of creating chaos and division within Northern Ireland I say "Think again". You are simply sustaining a cause which is disgraced and discredited throughout the world.