



PRESS RELEASE

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MAJOR THE RT. HON.
J.D. CHICHESTER-CLARK, D.L., M.P., AT A PRESS
CONFERENCE IN STORMONT CASTLE TO-DAY, SUNDAY,
17TH AUGUST, 1969

We have, of course, been doing what we can to provide you all with a regular and accurate supply of information on the public order situation in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland. I have, however, invited you to come here to-day so that my colleagues and I may put before you, and through you to the public, our views on some of the wider issues involved. This is vitally necessary in view of a great deal of speculation, much of it wide of the mark.

I want to deal first of all with the nature and origins of the disturbances which began in Londonderry and subsequently spread to Belfast and other centres. It has been widely suggested that these stemmed from two courses. First of all, in Londonderry, it has been said that the disorders arose from the decision of the Northern Ireland Government to allow the Apprentice Boys' March to proceed there on 12th August. It has been suggested, with the benefit of hind-sight, that this was an irresponsible decision, taken in the face of pressures to which we ought not to have yielded.

The fact of the matter, however, is that although various people expressed some anxiety about the proposed march, absolutely no evidence came to hand of plans either to behave violently on the march or to mount violent opposition to it. Over the days leading up to it, we discussed the situation with a considerable number of representative bodies. None of them suggested a ban; indeed their concern was to find ways in which they could contribute to a peaceful outcome. In a striking demonstration of the community's desire for peace, representatives of the Bogside area met representatives of the Apprentice Boys. The clear message coming to us out of Londonderry was that every responsible element in the City wanted to achieve a

1.

/day free from any

day free from any sort of disorder.

It is so easy to be wise after the event. Had we known that, behind this peaceful facade, extreme militant elements were secretly making careful preparations for trouble, we might have arrived at a different decision. But those who were so violent in their words and actions over the days following 12th August were very careful to conceal these preparations before the event. And what you have got to remember is that the law permits a parade to proceed unless serious public disorder is anticipated. The cancellation of an annual demonstration which had always been orderly and well-conducted could only have been justified by positive evidence of serious trouble brewing. I repeat, we did not have such evidence.

So much for the alleged specific cause of trouble in Londonderry. But we have also seen it argued that a more general cause of the disorders, both there and in Belfast, has been the slowing-down or reversal of reforms to which my predecessor's Government was committed.

That is absolutely and monstrously untrue. On 21st May with my colleagues I went to see Harold Wilson, and I outlined to him in precise detail our intentions in relation to reform, giving the precise time-table we intended to follow, including the enactment of various major pieces of legislation in the present Session of Parliament. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary accepted the content and the pace of this programme as completely satisfactory. Here is what Mr. Wilson said at Westminster on 22nd May, 1969 (Hansard, column 669):-

"What we are appealing for is an attempt to stop the feeling that reforms are more likely to be achieved by rioting in the streets or blowing up installations than by getting decisions in the Stormont Parliament, which is the legitimate place for them."

What a tragedy that his appeal went unheeded! And he continued:-

"We shall of course press the Stormont Government to get on with these Measures. After yesterday's report, I am satisfied that they are determined to do so."

Since then we have not withdrawn or postponed a single proposal.

Indeed, the only departure from our time-table has been to bring out the July proposals for local government reform which were originally not due until the Autumn. At my last meeting with the Home Secretary I again said that I trusted the content and pace of our reform programme remained satisfactory to the United Kingdom Government. He confirmed that this was so.

I ask myself why, in these circumstances, it should be put about that we are seeing here an uprising against an unjust and intransigent Government. I repudiate this utterly. It is said solely as part of a deliberate campaign to discredit and subvert this Government, whose basis, I would remind you, is a parliamentary majority elected on "one man, one vote", just as at Westminster. The real cause of the disorder is to be found in the activities of extreme Republican elements and others determined to overthrow our State. That is why we have found it necessary to detain a considerable number of known and dangerous agitators.

The Chief of Staff of the I.R.A. has admitted that his organisation has been "giving leadership, helping with stones, petrol bombs and 'mark the words' other traditional methods of defence". I must say that attempting to set people and property on fire hardly strikes me as a defensive technique, and I would remind you again that the trouble in Belfast began with firing upon the police at widely-scattered locations within a short period of time. We have too open attempts to recruit Republican forces in the South for intervention here.

In this grave situation, the behaviour of the Dublin Government has been deplorable, and tailor-made to inflame opinion on both sides. The moving of Army units, the calling-up of reserves, the absurd approaches for United Nations intervention have all been moves of almost incredible clumsiness and ineptitude. I am glad to say that Dr. Hillery returned to his Department in Dublin from his visit to the Foreign Office after what he himself described as a polite but very firm brush-off. These manoeuvres in ordinary circumstances would be merely comic, but in the present inflamed atmosphere they represent a gamble with people's lives. I think that is a very squalid business, and all that the Dublin Government has done is to convince us for all time that we must look elsewhere for our friends. We held out our hand to them as good neighbours.

They have behaved much like those hooligans who have used the present troubles as an excuse to burn their neighbours out.

So much for the causes of disorders. I now turn to the methods by which we are coping with the situation, and the political and other implications of these methods. On 14th August, as you all know, we asked all available Special Constables to report to police stations. I have seen much criticism of our use of these police reserves. I ask you to put yourselves for a moment into the shoes of this Government. Disorder was mounting; riots had taken place in ten different towns the night before; great damage was being done; lives were clearly at risk; the regular police forces were at the point of exhaustion. How could we have faced our consciences had we allowed such a situation to persist without calling in rapidly such reserves as were available to us?

There remained, of course, the Army. But the civil power has a clear duty to try to cope with a situation itself by all possible means before summoning military aid. To ask for military help is an extreme step, and it involves troops in the most disagreeable of tasks. Nevertheless, once the situation clearly deteriorated to the point where the civil power required assistance, we did not hesitate to seek it, and the response of the United Kingdom Government was swift and decisive. They have demonstrated, as we knew they would, that citizens in this part of the United Kingdom are entitled to no whit less protection than their fellow-citizens in Great Britain.

I would now like to say something about the deployment and management of troops in this situation. At least one newspaper to-day spoke of "muddle" in this context. There is no such muddle. Let me outline the arrangements operating. Starting yesterday morning representatives of the Army are meeting daily with representatives of the police and of the civil power. On the basis of intelligence reports the situation prevailing and anticipated is very fully assessed. Any evidence of likely disorder in any particular area is fed into the assessment. It is on this basis that the deployment of troops for the following 24 hours is decided. Their actual management within that role is of course a matter for their own commanders. If at any time the position revealed is one beyond the joint capacity of police and the Army at existing strength, machinery exists for the very rapid consideration of

possible reinforcement. Let me make this very clear. The Army is here to assist the civil authority. The civil authority is not concealing anything from the Army nor is it taking any unilateral decisions about their deployment. The best joint use of troops and police is decided in full and regular consultation, on the best information about the overall situation available to both civil and military authorities. One saw this position operating yesterday in relation to the Ardoyne area of Belfast. Information about the situation in that area was fully considered within the joint machinery, and troops deployed yesterday evening.

Finally, let me deal with some of the consequences and implications of the situation. Here, too, there has been much comment and speculation. I have seen fairly widespread reports that we might be asked to consider a broadly-based coalition government here. First of all, no such suggestion has come to us from the United Kingdom Authorities, nor indeed could it come with any propriety. But let me deal with the suggestion at all events. In grave emergencies such as a state of War communities often draw together in a political coalition because the community of interest transcends ordinary divisions. There is, however, one absolutely essential prerequisite if a coalition is to succeed. However divided on means, its members must agree about vital ends. Otherwise it is likely to be a mere forum for wrangling and the reverse of firm or effective government. Here in Northern Ireland the position is that most of the political Opposition are opposed to the Government party on the most fundamental of all issues - the very existence of the State itself. How can one coalesce with people who one week demand a recall of Parliament and the next week, when it is recalled, stage an apparently carefully-prepared walkout. Government cannot ally itself with disruption.

I would emphasize that in ruling out a political coalition I am not rejecting other means of achieving a broadly-based support for a return to peace and a resumption of progress. Indeed we clearly must find means to bridge the divisions between moderate and responsible people of different outlook, if we are to cope effectively with extremists and irresponsibles of all kinds.

Secondly, I have seen speculation about serious constitutional consequences stemming from the deployment of troops in Northern

Ireland. Now of course the committal here of forces which are responsible to the United Kingdom Government means that the normal consultation between the two Governments must become even more constant and intimate. This is already being done. We fully appreciate that the United Kingdom Government and the Westminster Parliament must be satisfied that troops are involved only in a setting about which they can be confident and that the situation had arisen through no failure or error of this Government. But some of the speculation goes further than this. It suggests that the United Kingdom Government should seek to involve itself deeply and directly in the affairs which are at the moment our primary concern. No one here would dispute the sovereign authority of Westminster to secure its will, but my colleagues and I believe that the existence of a responsible Government in this part of the United Kingdom is, not only, the course which most commends itself to a majority of Ulster people, but also the course which prevents Westminster becoming involved in a situation of which it was glad to be relieved almost 50 years ago.