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Title: Notes on visit of 3 Northern Ireland M.P.s to the Department of External Affairs seeking a meeting with the Taoiseach, and requesting that arms be provided for Catholics in the Falls Road area of Belfast

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SECRETVisit of Northern Ireland M.P.s to Department

1. Just before 10 p.m. on Saturday, 16th August, Mr. Brian Gallagher, Assistant Secretary, contacted me to say that he had heard from the Duty Officer in the Department that three Northern M.P.s were in the Department seeking an interview with the Taoiseach for the purpose of obtaining arms for the Catholics in the Falls Road area in Belfast. We agreed that I should go into the Department to see them rather than that they should have to deal with the Duty Officer. Mr. Gallagher said I could tell them that the Taoiseach was not available for interview; that he had heard of the worsening situation in Belfast and the appeal of Bishop Philbin for British troops in the Ardoyne area; that appropriate action had been taken through the Chargé d'Affaires in London. It was later confirmed that British troops entered the Ardoyne area and that the situation was generally quiet in Belfast.

2. I reached the Department around 10.20 p.m. and saw the delegation in the waiting room. They were Mr. Paddy Devlin (N.I. Lab. - Belfast), Mr. Paddy O'Hanlon (Ind. - South Armagh) and Mr. Paddy Kennedy (Rep. Lab. - Central Belfast). I told them that I had come in to see them as soon as I could and enquired as to the particular reason for their visit. Mr. Kennedy, who was the main spokesman, said that the B Specials were on the loose in Belfast; that there was continuous sniping and that people were being shot down. More and more Catholics were being forced into the Falls Road area and were being forced further and further up in the Falls. Soon the whole Catholic population of Belfast would be concentrated in this area and they would be massacred. Bogside in Derry was mild compared to this. The Catholics there would have to defend themselves and their homes and they had to see the

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Taoiseach. They could not return to the North until they had seen him. If Irish troops would not be sent in to the North, then they wanted guns and they could not leave without definite answers to these questions. The situation of the Catholics in Belfast could not continue without protection. As regards guns, nothing need be done openly or politically - a few hundred rifles could easily be "lost" and would not be missed. I then gave them the message outlined above as conveyed to me by Mr. Gallagher. They were, however, so insistent in seeing the Taoiseach or getting answers to their questions about troops or guns that I felt I would have to go through the motions of conveying their message to the proper quarter. Therefore, I assured them that their message would be conveyed and I would do so forthwith. Then they insisted on returning to the Department in about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour for the answers.

3. I informed Mr. O'Dowd, the Taoiseach's Private Secretary, of the foregoing and we agreed on a general form of reply which the Taoiseach approved with some modifications.

4. The three M.P.s returned to the Department at about 11.30 p.m. and asked if the Taoiseach was going to see them. I told them that I had conveyed all they said to the proper contact who again confirmed that the Taoiseach was not available for interview and that he might be even out of Dublin over the weekend. I said it was again confirmed that the Government had taken all the action open to them and that troops had entered Ardoyne and that the situation in Belfast was generally quiet. The request about troops or arms was a matter for Government and perhaps even for Dáil decision. I stressed that this did not indicate any lack of concern by the Government.

5. All three M.P.s reacted vehemently to this response saying

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that it was a fob off and an exasperating attitude. Mr. Devlin who was more angry and emotional than the others made for the door saying that he would see to it that he saw the Taoiseach before he left Dublin. He came back and muttered something abusive about the Government being responsible for deaths. All three then walked out of the Department led by Mr. Devlin. I followed them to the hall door and again expressed to Mr. Kennedy that they should not infer any lack of concern on the part of the Government or that such action as was open to them would not be taken.

X. 7. I then informed Mr. O'Dowd of the outcome, particularly in view of Mr. Devlin's statement that he would see to it that he saw the Taoiseach before he left Dublin.

18/8
Department of External Affairs
Dublin

18th August 1969

SGR/bt

cc Taoiseach's Private Secretary
Mr. P. Berry

X. In view of the possibility that an attempt might be made to contact the Taoiseach at his home, I telephoned Rathmines Garda Station at midnight and suggested that it might be desirable to strengthen the guard of the Taoiseach's home. Sergeant Ryan, to whom I spoke, assured me that this had already been done.

[Signature]
18.8.