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November 1969

Honorary Consul  
Johannesburg

We are grateful for your letter of 8th September, with enclosure of SABC news item on broadcast by Mr. J. Burns, MP.

Mr. Burns is a unionist member of the Belfast Parliament. You will appreciate that the recent exposure of the discrimination practised in Northern Ireland for the past 50 years has been a severe shock for people like Mr. Burns who were instrumental in this injustice. These practises - such as the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries for the purpose of obtaining undemocratic control of local government areas, discrimination in employment and housing allocation etc. - have been authoritatively described and condemned in the official commission of inquiry set up by Capt. O'Neill when he was Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and presided over by the distinguished Scottish judge, Lord Cameron. It was this discriminatory regime, and the attempts to suppress democratic opposition to it which led to riot and the eventual breakdown of law and order in Northern Ireland. The introduction of far-reaching reform, as a result of the intervention of the British government whose troops had to be called in because of this breakdown of law and order, is the clearest proof of the existence of previous discrimination.

It is not unexpected that some unionists sought to find other scapegoats and inevitable perhaps that such bogey-men as communists, anarchists etc. should be named by them in an attempt to remove the clear responsibility from themselves. It was no doubt particularly painful for Mr. Burns to have it recognised that 35% of the population of Derry were enabled - as the Cameron Report illustrates - to provide the majority of the corporation of the city of Derry for 47 years, by a gerrymander system! - the "extraordinary situation" as the Cameron Report called it, by which 8,781 voters elected 12 representatives and 14,429 elected 8.

It is right to say that statements like those of Mr. Burns do not represent present responsible unionist opinion.

No doubt this item was one of many broadcast on the situation. It would be of interest to have your brief impression as to how the events in the North were, in general, dealt with. I might mention that many newspapers e.g. London Times, Guardian, Le Monde, Frankfurter Allgemeine, Trouw (Netherlands Protestant) dealt harshly with this bogey-man use of non-existent anarchists etc. as an explanation for the tragic events in the North.

F. O'R.

Secretary