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C.S.

Note on Events in Belfast 20-22 May, 1971Causes

- 1) The Guardian of 22 May states that Catholic girls who work at Gallaher's factory (where, incidentally they constitute less than 10% of the work force) and who attended Reid's funeral on the previous day were abused and bullied by Protestant girls. The Catholic girls reportedly claim that unrest at the factory predates that incident. Other newspaper reports agree generally with the Guardian's account.
- 2) What is more important than the circumstances that gave rise to the protest outside Gallaher's factory is the manner in which it was dealt with. There is evidence that excessive force was employed by the troops. An Army spokesman in Lisburn was quoted as saying: "Some of our men may have lost their cool a bit at one stage" (Irish Times). A picture in the Guardian of 22 May shows a soldier being restrained by colleagues. Television pictures also show that the degree of force exercised by some soldiers appeared to be far in excess of what was required or justified. Responsible minority leaders in the North have expressed the same view and have strongly condemned the tactics of the Royal Highland Fusiliers. The Army denials are far less convincing than the evidence of brutality. Several of those brought to court were marked and blood-stained. One Opposition MP (Fitt) claimed that troops had shouted at people in the area: "You got three of ours, now we are going to get you". (This was a reference to the deaths of three British soldiers several weeks previously). Mr. Fitt called for the withdrawal of the Royal Highland Fusiliers from the area.
- 3) A British soldier, Corporal Bankier of the Royal Green Jackets, was shot on Friday night, presumably as a retaliatory measure for the death of William Reid and the incidents of the two previous days.

General

The role of the British Army is ^{primarily} to protect the minority. The Taoiseach has found it necessary to criticise its tactics in the past. The curfew of July, 1970 and the lack of impartiality in the search for arms has to a large extent alienated the people from the Army. On 6th February, the Taoiseach referred to a number of reasons for tension in the area including "political mistakes and tactical errors"; insensitivity in dealing with the minority e.g. failure to provide for reasonable consultation between the security authorities and local community leaders; and he made the point that "if wise and moderate leadership is not supported whole communities become disaffected and extremism leads by default".

The Taoiseach has repeatedly condemned those who advocate or use force in the North. The minority is still suffering severely from discrimination in jobs etc. and in certain cases are subjected to intimidation and insults at their places of residence (Unity Flats, etc.). He had this in mind when issuing his statement last Friday.

Despite denials, the Taoiseach is convinced from the reliable information available to him that excessive force was used at the weekend; that this only serves to alienate the minority still further. There are demands from TDs here in the South for action such as the recall of the Royal Highland Fusiliers, the calling in of UN Observers and UN Peace-keeping forces and PQs have already been tabled in that sense.

There should be full and proper consultation with minority leaders in the North who retain the confidence of the people. Difficult situations can often be defused in this fashion as riot situations often arise out of over-reaction by the security forces.


25 May, 1971

Dept of Foreign Affairs