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2 July 1976

In moving the Northern Ireland (Various Emergency Provisions) Continuance Order 1976 in the House of Commons today, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Merlyn Rees MP, said:-

On 14 June, I gave to the House an account of the current security situation in Northern Ireland. As I made clear to the House, the most important security need is to make a direct contribution to reducing the level of violence in the Province. This is the touchstone by which the ordinary citizen will judge the policy as a whole.

In the debate on 14 June I gave the Government view on security. I explained that we were facing a long haul. I said that violence is currently high. We have seen in recent months an upsurge both of bomb attacks on commercial property and of murderous assaults on the security forces, particularly the police. This year six members of the Regular Army, seven members of the UDR and fifteen members of the RUC have been killed; and 148 civilians have died as a result of the security situation, compared with 196 last year. This is a serious situation, as grave as the Province has faced since the troubles started. We are nevertheless dealing with a changing situation: as I told the House on 14 June, there is at present less organised street violence than formerly, though it has not been entirely eliminated; and the number of shooting incidents has remained at the lower level established during 1975. I can assure the House that, in these circumstances, the security forces are not pulling their punches nor operating under any form of political restraint. On the contrary, the level of activity of the security forces has in fact become more intense to meet the terrorist threat. My right hon and learned Friend the Attorney General will say something about charges and convictions later. And, as another example of security force activity, over 12 tons of explosive material has been recovered or neutralised this year, compared with just under 10 tons in the whole of 1975.

I also made clear on 14 June that we were awaiting the final proposals of the Ministerial Committee in Law and Order into the nature of the foreseeable threat; on the forces and measures that are required to deal with it and to achieve the rule of law; and on the way in which successful action will depend upon interdependence and co-operation between the Army, the Police and other locally recruited forces.

At the same time, I made clear that the studies my advisers have carried out for the Ministerial Committee have already begun to inform practical action, and that movement and change has begun. The House will recall the three points I made in this respect. The Chief Constable is setting up three regional crime squads; he is establishing units at headquarters and in support of the regional crime squads to collate resources and intelligence to secure convictions; and he is extending and strengthening specialised units dealing with forensic and similar technical work.

I must emphasise that the Ministerial Committee has been concerned with long term issues. It has taken a cool hard look at what the long term situation demands. The Committee's work has not been designed to produce a detailed blueprint. It has been concerned with a framework for the future - a framework, moreover, that allows action to be adapted to immediate and changing circumstances.

*W* The Ministerial Committee has now completed its work. I would have liked to publish its results. But by their nature, it would not be in the public interest to disclose the details. I will, however, describe in broad terms their findings.

The Committee assessed the threat of violence. It is not always appreciated how many different kinds there are. I will list the principal ones for the House: horrifying assassinations of leading figures; senseless sectarian violence, attacks on individuals, expulsion of enclaves of the other community, demonstrations and provocative marches; attacks on the Army and RUC; explosive and incendiary attacks on commercial and economic targets; on prestige targets; armed robbery and other crimes for personal gain; vandalism; violence in prisons; civil disobedience; resistance to the administration of normal provisions of the law.

Moreover, irrespective of terrorist crime there will be a major problem over the next few years with serious crime, such as protection rackets and a high level of crime committed by juveniles, much of which has arisen as an offshoot of terrorism.

There is, too, an erosion of values and standards which manifests itself in the repudiation of debts, and the evasion of payments for services. These illegalities are often justified by reference to some ideal or political aim which their commission is alleged to support.

The Committee recognised that there was no instant solution and no way of ridding the Province of violence overnight. The Army provides and will continue to provide the basic security buttress and I have made clear that co-operation between the security forces is already good and will continue to develop in the new circumstances. The only way forward is the way in which law and order has always been established in this country - by the police working to the law and securing its effective administration. Every other way of introducing law and order will always alienate one or other section or group of the community, who will come to feel that they have been unfairly dealt with. Alienation will grow and lawlessness will increase.

At the heart of the Committee's conclusions is therefore the idea of securing police acceptance and effectiveness. By securing police effectiveness is meant the integration and acceptance of the police in the community to enable them to administer law and order effectively. It does not mean a return to the past. This is a particularly difficult and challenging task because of the legacy of Irish history. There is a traditional sensitivity and antipathy to the police. This stems from the history of the island over the last seven centuries, and particularly from the enactments of the 18th century. We have to recognise that the police are not acceptable in all areas of Northern Ireland today. The police will consequently have to overcome the legacy of the past as well as of the experience of the last seven years.

To increase the effectiveness of the police the Committee's main conclusions for the measures and forces required are as follows:-

As far as the RUC is concerned

- (a) an increase in the size of the force;
- (b) the continuing introduction of further specialist investigation teams as appropriate, eg murder squads and fraud squads. In some cases, recruitment for and training in new skills will be needed; in others, the present specialist capacity will be expanded to meet requirements;
- (c) improved arrangements for collecting and collating criminal intelligence, focusing on presenting information quickly and accurately in the form relevant to the specific police activity;

- (d) flexible use of resources to concentrate on serious crime and preventive policing. These resources will be expanded to serve in each RUC division. They will as a whole also constitute a mobile force for deployment outside their divisions;
- (e) a special effort will be needed to make the RUC more representative (the percentage of Catholics has declined in recent years but there has been an improvement over the last six months). But this will depend to some extent upon political factors and the opinion leaders in the minority community speaking up more frequently for the RUC;
- (f) expanded training arrangements. Where appropriate use would be made of universities;
- (g) greater use to be made of the RUC Reserve to reduce the regular police and the Army where appropriate;
- (h) further development of the scheme for local police centres which I approved in September 1974, whereby local centres to provide a police presence, to provide advice and guidance, and for immediate access to police resources, are provided in areas where a full-time police station is not justifiable. These centres also aim to encourage the minority community to help by supporting the police in their own areas.

To implement these measures for the RUC will of course require an increase in the number of its personnel. At the moment the strength of the RUC is working up to the establishment laid down in September 1974. The regular RUC now totals 5050 of an establishment of 6500. The full-time Reserve has reached over 700 out of a total of 1400. We shall take energetic steps to recruit up to these establishment figures, and we shall raise the establishment to meet the developing requirements implicit in this programme.

The Committee also paid considerable attention to public relations and drew attention to the need:-

- (a) to emphasise and demonstrate the effectiveness and impartiality of the security forces;
- (b) to increase further and improve the link between the RUC and local authorities, community organisations etc by increasing the number of

liaison committees and community relations teams;

(c) to promote public understanding of the role of the Police Authority.

It was also concluded that the RUC programme of community relations development should be vigorously pursued, but this is not a matter for the police alone: there are many authorities both public and private, which have a vital contribution in the development and improvement of the community. There is an inter-dependence between these activities and improvements in law and order. It is wrong to think of community relations work simply as a buttress for law and order. If it is done for that motive alone, it will surely fail. But by increasing people's interest, concern and involvement in the peaceful and lawful development of their communities a most significant contribution is made to the achievement of the rule of law. This is one of the wider dimensions of security of which we must never lose sight.

The Committee also considered the strength and role of the Army and the UDR. The Committee recognised that the manner and the strength in which the Army would need to be deployed would, as always, have to depend on the security situation at any particular time and the progress made in restoring the rule of law.

They concluded that there should be increased use of the UDR in such duties as relieving regular units of tasks such as the manning of permanent vehicle check points. There are at the moment a number of full-time UDR soldiers in each battalion who provide the necessary services to enable the part-time members to operate efficiently. Whilst the overall strength of the UDR is below current establishment the full-time members are now practically up to their establishment of 1600. The Committee are agreed on the need for an increase in the establishment of the permanent cadre. The details and arrangements for this increase are now being worked out. The permanent cadre would take part in the full range of UDR duties but, as I explained on 14 June, there will be no change in the role and basic character of the UDR.

These then are the main conclusions of the Committee. I repeat they are guidelines for the future. I must make it clear, however, Mr Speaker, that the proposals are all inter-related. They are dependent on each other. No doubt there will be some who will distort them by pretending to confuse the part with the whole and who will coin slogans such as "Army withdrawal". The truth is, however, that the Committee's conclusions, taken as a whole, show how efficient forces can be built up for the long term while ensuring that in the short and medium term, an adequate number of

soldiers remain in the Province to ensure that the security situation does not get out of hand. The conclusions are long term and are not intended to be applied rigidly. They do not affect the number of soldiers which will depend on the security situation.

I must emphasise that the Army will stay in Northern Ireland as long as it is required. Their role at present is a vital one; the way in which they carry it out deserves the highest tribute. Similar praise should be given to the valuable work of the UDR and Police.

The way forward is through the rule of law administered by the police. The community, however, has a vital role. Policing can only be effective with support from the community and in Northern Ireland this means both parts of the community. I am in no doubt that since the ending of detention that support has increased considerably. But if the fight against terrorism is to continue to improve the security forces need even more co-operation against the terrorist whatever his sectarian label.

Perhaps at this point, Mr Speaker, I might say a brief word on the Police Authority. The terms of office of members of the Police Authority expired on 28 June and appointments have been made. I have already announced the appointment of Mr Myles Humphreys and Mr Ivor Canavan as the new Chairman and Vice-Chairman. In addition, and in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Police Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, I have appointed 17 further members of whom 5 are elected representatives from District Councils and 8 are representative of the other interests specified in the Act.

As the Government said in the White Paper of January 1976, we see a continuing role for an independent Police Authority with significant powers. Consistent with that view I intend that the Police Authority should exercise to the full their responsibilities to the police and to the community, and I propose to hold regular meetings with the new Authority both to seek their views on the needs and wishes of the community in regard to policing and to provide a forum for discussion on policing matters generally.

As I have explained to the House on previous occasions I am constantly reviewing the law relating to offences in the light of the changing security situation to discover whether any changes in the law should be made in order to assist the security forces in their task of bringing terrorists before the courts. This is a matter with which the Attorney General is much concerned and on which there have

been discussions with the Chief Constable and the Director of Public Prosecutions. I would emphasise that in looking at offences one must always have in mind the possibility of evidence being obtained on the basis of which a prosecution can proceed. Without evidence there can be no prosecution.

The Gardiner Committee undertook a comprehensive review of the subject in 1974 and most of their recommendations were implemented by the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) (Amendments) Act 1975. In the light of experience and study since then we have some further small, but I think useful, changes in mind. I hope that the Attorney will be able to intervene and talk about them later in the debate. I will be seeking an early opportunity for such legislation as will be necessary to introduce them.

Mr Speaker, I have today outlined the long term security plans of the Government. They are an attempt to avoid repeating past history. As a consequence, there is no question of setting up a para-military police force; of policemen replacing soldiers overnight; of the premature forcing of the police into difficult areas. There will be no precipitate Army withdrawal. What we have is a flexible plan for achieving the rule of law by effective police work, developing over time, enhanced by increased co-operation with the Irish Republic, and always backed when necessary by the Army. But in setting the guidelines for the future, we must not forget the present. That is why we seek the renewal of the present range of emergency legislation.

The Act of 1973 contains the powers essential for the security forces in the present emergency, special provisions for trials including the procedure for a single judge without a jury to try scheduled offences, and the powers of proscription. The Act of 1975 clarifies and extends certain powers of the security forces and provides for a system of detention, placing the sole responsibility for making detention orders with the Secretary of State.

The Northern Ireland (Young Persons) Act 1974 enables me to give a direction in the case of a young person remanded or committed for trial for his custody in a prison or such other place as may be specified, where I am satisfied that this is necessary in order to prevent the young person's escape, or to secure his safety or that of other persons. In the present circumstances the provisions of the 1974 Act are still necessary.

It is because of the continuing emergency that I seek the renewal of these emergency powers. As I have said, the killings are continuing. In some ways the situation is as bad as the situation in 1972. It would be irresponsible of me to give up the existing emergency provisions. All of them might have to be used if the circumstances call for them, detention included.

There have been occasions in the last 7 years when the men of violence have misjudged the mood of the majority in the Province, the mood of this House, and the mood of successive Governments. Perhaps we have sometimes misjudged theirs. With all humility, I do not think we misjudge it today. We see them still as far away as they have ever been from their declared objectives. We see them faced with increased war weariness and disillusion with their bestial methods by the overwhelming majority of thinking people in both communities in Northern Ireland.

The achievement of a peaceful society through the progressive development of the rule of law is the most realistic way forward in Northern Ireland. It is the only policy that neither puts back the clock to the past nor leaves the present policy set in a static mould.

The speed with which a peaceful society can be attained depends upon resources and the support of the people. The Government will provide the necessary resources, but the will and action needed for their successful employment depends upon the people of the Province. With their wholehearted support and co-operation it will be possible for the agencies of government to restore a peaceful society through the rule of law.

I therefore commend the Order for the support of the House.