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Reference Code:	2018/28/2248
Creation Dates:	17 March 1988
Extent and medium:	3 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
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For O'Donovan

From Donoghue

Debate following statement by King in Commons yesterday, 17 March

1. Kevin McNamara supported Secretary of State's comments and said he was sure the House would wish to associate itself with the calls made by the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach and church leaders on both sides of the divide for no retaliation. By giving due respect to the wishes of the families, the security forces had been left in a position in which they could do no right. Labour believed that the security forces had been right to hold back at Milltown. McNamara went on, however, to pose a series of detailed questions which pointed in the direction of the "collusion" theory, among which were the following:

- if the white van was an RUC vehicle, why was it (as reported in the media) old and battered and why did it contain only two policemen? What did the latter think was happening? Why did they drive away? Did they alert colleagues? etc.
- could an "Irish Times" report that there were other vehicles be confirmed?
- did the helicopter which was reportedly seen over the man see him and, if so, what action did they take?
- had the type and origin of the weapons used been established? Did they come from the haul seized last January which was destined for the UVF?

2. King expressed appreciation for McNamara's remarks, in particular his endorsement of the Chief Constable's decision. Responses to the individual questions were a matter for the police.

3. Jim Molyneux asked King to refute the "collusion" theory. King described this as a monstrous and demonstrable lie. Asked by a Tory MP

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to comment on the remarks made by certain priests, in particular Fr. Raymond Murray, he said that he had found the reported remarks deeply distressing as had many in the Catholic community.

4. Seamus Mallon said that he had been one of those who had consistently requested the RUC to adopt the position at these funerals which they had done yesterday. "What they did was right and they should be under no attack from any other quarter whatsoever". People in Northern Ireland knew that if someone wanted to commit an attack, no amount of security could prevent this. Mallon suggested, however, that the British Government's approach in N.I. was perceived to be confrontational and that this had in itself contributed to the difficulties. King thanked Mallon, acknowledged that he had held these views sincerely for a long time but rejected the suggestion that the Government approach was confrontational.

5. David Alton said that the best course for the Government was to pursue its policies of the past two years: consolidation of the A-I Agreement and full support for the security forces. King responded to this by welcoming the news of a further arms find in the Republic yesterday, which might prove to be very significant (though full details were not yet available). He welcomed the determination of the Irish Government (as confirmed by the Taoiseach to the Prime Minister) to work closely with the UK Government in eradicating violence.

6. Ken Maginnis said that measures must be taken to ensure that all para-militaries were dealt with. A start could be made by introducing selective internment which would take certain "godfathers" out of the community. King replied by noting the very real difficulties in relation both to proscription of organisations and selective internment (in particular the possibility that they might make matters worse rather than better) but said that these matters were being kept under review.

7. John Hume welcomed the unanimous condemnation and calls for restraint in N.I. He hoped the Catholic community would respond with the same restraint as protestants had shown after Enniskillen. Had the weapons or

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ammunition used been found yet? King thanked Hume for his helpful statements yesterday. He understood two hand-guns had been involved - they had not been-recovered yet, though their type had been identified. The origin of the grenades was also being investigated and further information would shortly be available.

8. Martin Smyth suggested the British Government should follow the lead of the Dublin Government and ban the use of the media for promoting the actions of terrorists. King said he had no proposals in that direction at the moment. There were obvious difficulties in attempting to deny access to T.V. to those announcing themselves as political parties. He agreed, however, that the media carried a great responsibility.

9. The debate concluded with efforts by Ken Livingstone and Clare Short to raise the question of British troop withdrawal. King responded sharply, saying that successive Irish Governments had recognised that the problem would not be solved by the withdrawal of British troops at the present time and that the way forward lay in the two countries standing together to defeat terrorism and to let the democratic views of the N.I. people be heard.

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