



CAB/4/1427

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PRESS RELEASE

The Prime Minister (Captain O'Neill) has released the following statement from Stormont Castle.

At their meeting today the Cabinet considered what further action may be necessary to avoid any recurrence of violence in any part of Northern Ireland and to examine those incidents which have already taken place. As a result the following Cabinet decisions are now announced:-

- (1) Ministers will advise His Excellency the Governor to appoint a high-level and independent Commission with the following terms of reference:-

"To inquire into and report upon the course of events leading to, and the immediate causes and nature of the violence and civil disturbance in Northern Ireland on and since 5th October, 1968; and to assess the composition, conduct and aims of those bodies involved in the current agitation and in any incidents arising out of it."

- (2) In the light of their decision to recommend the appointment of this Commission, which will be able to examine the situation without fear or favour, Ministers will not tolerate any civil disorder or other disregard of the law. In particular they will not hesitate to use any available powers, including the power to ban, in order to deal with further provocative demonstrations.

- (3) Ministers are also determined to reinforce and extend existing legal powers. Accordingly, Parliament will be asked at a very early date to approve a number of amendments of and extensions to the Public Order Act (N.I.) 1951. The new legislation will include provisions to:-

- (a) set out in further detail the principles to be followed by the Police in the directions they give to processions;

- (b) make it an offence not merely (as at present) to organise or assist in the organisation of a procession which has been banned or of which no notice has been given, but also to take part in any such procession;

/(c) make it clear

- (c) make it clear that no counter procession or meeting will be allowed to interfere with a customary procession or one permitted by and complying with the directions of the Police;
- (d) make it an offence to hinder, molest, obstruct or act in a disorderly manner towards persons in a lawful procession;
- (e) require persons suspected of having an intention of acting as at (d) above to give their names and addresses to the Police;
- (f) make it an offence to organise, control, manage, train or take part in any association of persons which usurps the functions of the Police or the Armed Forces of the Crown, or is employed for the use or display of physical force in promoting any political object;
- (g) substantially increase certain existing penalties for offences under the Act of 1951; and
- (h) otherwise strengthen or improve the law in this field.

Ministers are confident that these decisions - a fair and impartial investigation of the causes of agitation, coupled with strict enforcement of the current law and a strengthening and extension of legal powers - will be well received by the public at large.

15th January, 1969.