

As we speak, Mr Maudling is in the air heading back to London. This afternoon he joins both Mr Heath and Mr Wilson in talks on the Northern Ireland problem. Ian Mitchell talked to Mr Maudling before he boarded his plane and asked him how he saw the priorities now.

Maudling - "Obviously, nothing can be right until the violence has been suppressed. On the other hand we cannot wait for the suppression of violence in order to start the talking about the future. That is why I so deeply regret the unwillingness of the SDLP and the Nationalists to come and talk to me. Because by refusing even to talk they are going to prolong the agonies of their own people."

Mitchell - "And you have still not been able to see them?"

Maudling - "I offered them, I invited them to come and see me wholly on the condition that they could discuss anything they wanted to with me but they just won't come. Well, how can you possibly reach agreement with people when they won't even talk."

Mitchell - "You spoke then this morning to Dr Paisley? Was this a useful meeting?"

Maudling - "Yes, I saw for the first time Dr Paisley and his Party members from Stormont. I had seen, as you know, other Party members, representatives from Stormont, as part of my general talks on the future. It was the first time I had seen them as a Party, it was very interesting, they explained their point of view to me and confirmed that it was to be found in more detail in the Hansard at Stormont."

Mitchell - "Do you see any future in Mr Wilson's ideas for Ireland?"

Maudling - "Well, I think his proposal for inter-Party talks was a very valuable one. I am in fact going back to London in order to participate with Mr Heath, in precisely talks of that character with Mr Wilson this afternoon."

Mitchell - "Finally, could I ask you if you are more optimistic now that you have been here again."

Maudling - "People also ask me whether I am more or less optimistic. I don't answer, because I don't think it's a meaningful question frankly. The situation is tragic, deeply tragic, but the determination of everyone I know - of the security forces, Government and alike - to bring it under control is unabated."

William Hardcastle - "Before that interview, Mr Maudling held a news conference and Simon Winchester of the Guardian was there. He came on the line from the RAF airfield near Belfast, from which the Home Secretary departed, and I asked Simon could he read

any significance between the lines of what Mr Maudling had to say."

Winchester - "Yes, I think there were two things. One of them fairly depressing, one fairly optimistic. The first was when he admitted after his conversations with the GOC yesterday, he admitted that the Army sees that it's not going to be possible to reduce the violence to nil, only to reduce it to a certain level. This is a line which some senior officers were putting out last week, and now the Home Secretary has confirmed it. The violence will not be eradicated in Northern Ireland for a long time but it will be reduced to a level which Mr Maudling hopes will be acceptable, though he wouldn't specify what this level of violence could be. I think this is likely to depress quite a number of people over here, especially of course the hard-line Loyalists who will claim that the B Specials and the old RUC would have been able to contain the IRA much more effectively than the Army seem to be saying they are going to be able to do now.

The second thing was over the question of internment. You will remember that at the Westminster Debate Mr Callaghan put forward some ideas for "improving internment", to use his phrase, trying to alter internment in some ways that would make the SDLP and the rest of the Opposition come back to the conference table and start talking. Mr Maudling when he was asked about whether he had any views on improving internment, bringing internees to some form of courts, was rather less than non-committal. He did suggest that talks were going on and that some progress was being made and that in fact internment might be in some way altered in the future."

Hardcastle - "In fact, Simon, while Mr Maudling was holding his news conference we heard that Mr Wilson is seeing Mr Heath this afternoon on the subject of Ireland and Mr Maudling is apparently joining the talks when he lands over here. Do you regard that as being significant in any way?"

Winchester - "Yes, this is the formal beginning of the inter-Party talks about which we have heard so much. Mr Maudling said as much at the press conference today. He is going over rather unbriefed, he confessed, to see Mr Wilson and I believe Mr Callaghan as well and the Prime Minister, to start the long-awaited inter-Party talks which will of course among other things discuss the possible eventual re-unification of Ireland."

Hardcastle - "You are probably aware that there has been a flurry of new rumours about direct rule from Westminster being put to Northern Ireland. Was there anything in what Mr Maudling had to say to prove or disprove these rumours.?"

Winchester - "He said that no-one today had put forward any firm proposals for direct rule and that he personally did not think it was on the cards at the moment, but a number had pressed him on whether he thought the direct control of security in Northern Ireland should be taken over by Westminster. He merely reiterated what he had said in

Westminster a couple of weeks ago, that it would present certain difficulties, but my own guess is that this is something about which a lot of talking is going on at present."

Harcastle - "Just one final point, Simon, would you consider as being significant that this morning the head of the Orange Order re-raised the question of the creation of a new security force in Northern Ireland."

Winchester - "Well, I don't believe Mr Maudling is going to have any truck with that sort of talk at the moment. We asked him about the Protestant vigilantes. He said he thought they were doing a good job. He went rather farther than Lord Carrington had gone when he was here a month ago. Lord Carrington said that he thought the Protestant vigilantes were a force that ought not to exist. Mr Maudling, however, was much more ... he agreed that they were doing a good job. I think he would rather leave the situation like that - an unarmed Protestant citizen force like this - but certainly no organised third force."