

NORTHERN IRELAND CENTRE

Regional Official (Policy)

Tom McKee

10 January 2002

Mr Mark Durkan

Deputy First Minister

Northern Ireland Assembly

Parliament Buildings

Stormont

BELFAST BT4



NASUWT
THE CAREER TEACHERS' ORGANISATION

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Dear Mr Durkan

Attack on Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Belfast

I write to request the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to intervene urgently in respect of the deplorable attack this morning on Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School in Belfast. Regardless of what grievances any individuals may have, there is no justification whatever in venting their anger on children or on their education.

We appreciate the action which your Office has already taken as a consequence of the conflict in the Upper Ardoyne Road but this morning's attack is a deeply worrying escalation as far as schools are concerned. While, mercifully, it appears that no-one was injured this morning, children and staff are left in extreme apprehension that such an action of thuggery can be perpetrated in this brazen manner.

All schools must now be extremely concerned about their security.

I believe that it is crucially important that your Office pledges firm support for schools in terms of security arrangements and that it makes it clear that the strongest possible action will be taken against anyone who perpetrates attacks of this kind on schools.

Yours sincerely

TOM MCKEE

REGIONAL OFFICIAL (POLICY)

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**THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

***David Trimble, First Minister and
Mark Durkan, Deputy First Minister***

*Parliament Buildings,
Stormont, Belfast BT4 3XX*

Mr Tom McKee
Regional Official (Policy)
NASUWT
Ben Madge House
Edgewater Road
BELFAST
BT3 9JQ

Our Ref: COR 19/2002

12 March 2002

Dear Mr McKee

ATTACK ON OUR LADY OF MERCY SECONDARY SCHOOL, BELFAST

Thank you for your letter of 10 January concerning the attack on Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School. Unfortunately, this attack was followed by the tragic murder of Daniel McColgan and threats against teachers, school workers and postal workers as well as attacks on school buses including those travelling to and from the Girls' Model School and the Boys' Model School.

In a number of public statements following these attacks and threats, we made it clear that we deplored sectarian violence and condemned those responsible. We made contact with North Belfast MLAs and community workers and urged them to maintain their efforts to restore calm.

We invited the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to meet us and that meeting took place on 14 January. We are aware that, on the same day, the Minister for Education met representatives from a wide range of educational interests and that since then the Minister has held another similar meeting. We understand the very real concerns raised by trade unions, including your own, on behalf of their members.

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In the Assembly, on 14 January, we made it clear that we considered that threats against people who serve the community are totally reprehensible. We explained that security and policing are not the responsibility of the devolved administration, but rest with the Northern Ireland Office and the police. However, we made it clear that we support effective policing action against such threats.

As you will be aware, the provision of physical security measures in schools is a matter for the Department of Education. We understand that this matter has been discussed at meetings between the Department and education interests. We have been advised that extensive physical security measures are already in place in schools in North Belfast and that some additional funding has recently been secured to extend this. The Department has also informed us that the Belfast Education and Library Board has made an assessment of further physical security requirements and that arising from this the Department will seek further resources.

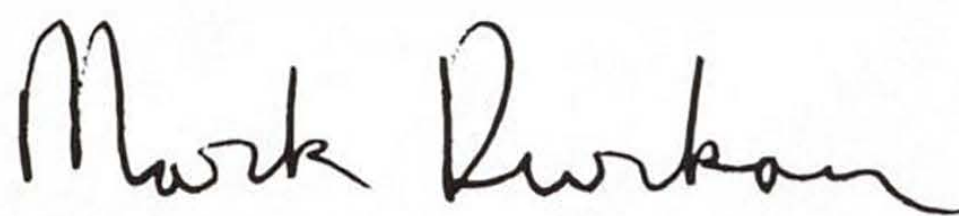
In your letter you express your appreciation for the steps which we are already taking in North Belfast and we thank you for this. As you may be aware, we, along with the Minister for Social Development, have launched the North Belfast Community Action Project, with the aim of putting in place a plan of short, medium and long-term actions to address social and community issues in North Belfast. The project is being lead by the Very Rev Dr John Dunlop with each of the six North Belfast MLAs nominating a community representative to work with the Project team. We recognise that there is no "quick fix" to the problems in North Belfast and we are fully committed to the medium and long-term work which will be needed to heal divisions in this area.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for the effort and commitment of teachers and school workers who continue to work in the interests of children and their parents in this very stressful environment.

Yours sincerely



RT HON DAVID TRIMBLE MP MLA



MARK DURKAN MLA

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