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SECRET

Mr. Hume telephoned me from Derry this afternoon. He is worried about the nervousness shown by practically everybody about the situation in Belfast. He does not agree that it is justified.

He pointed out that there are very few people involved in inspiring attacks on the British Army but agreed that there is a conscious end behind the bomb explosions. Whatever policy there is in the background to them is not one which commends itself to all but a very few extremists - on both sides.

The effect politically is exaggerated very much by the reactions of people who should be more sensible. In this respect he mentioned that the Unionists intend to demand the removal of General Freeland because of his statement that the British Army might be withdrawn and other remarks he has made in the past few days.

The net result is a feeling of hysteria which is dangerous and unproductive so far as the interests of the minority in the North are concerned.

The job of political leaders at the present time is to keep their heads and to call for calm and restraint. Hume himself has done so in a statement issued last night and published in the Irish Times this morning - copy attached.

COMMENT

Although Hume did not say so, I have the impression that he phoned me quite deliberately for the purpose of having this message conveyed to the Minister and the Taoiseach.

The present position, in which the minority have managed to obtain a conflict with the British Army in certain areas of Belfast, is not in their interest, as I see it. The political consequences of continual trouble of this kind in the Six Counties could be very serious for Mr. Wilson, even if the position does not deteriorate further. Mr. George Thomson has told the Minister that Conservatives are equally committed to reform in the North - and Mr. Hogg confirms this frequently. But history is quite clearly against genuine good-will on the part of the Conservative Party and, if there is any logic behind the activities of Mr. Craig and his allies, it must be based on the belief that a Conservative Government can be made to ease up on traditional unionism. Anything done by the minority at the present time which would embarrass the Labour Party in the forthcoming general election can be seen to play into the hands of hard-line Unionists.

As I said at par. 6 of my report of the 1st April, "I formed the impression [in Derry at the Easter weekend] that a solution to the problems of the North cannot really be achieved within the Callaghan terms of reference". The events since then in Belfast seem to me to bear out this opinion but nevertheless this is not the time to create difficulties for a Labour Government, which is the only one likely to extend Callaghan's terms of reference in due course.

84.
7th April 1970