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*Circulated, at instance of
Taoiseach, at this morning's
meeting of Government.*

*W.S.M.
18.8.69.*

The Situation in the North of Ireland

Background

The Government of Ireland have consistently made known their views on the urgent need to end the many forms of discrimination practised in the North of Ireland. They have pointed to the intolerable conditions under which the minority in the area have laboured, conditions which became entrenched in the social structure of the Six Counties through the continued unnatural division of Ireland. Over the last year, while the civil rights movement in the North gained increasing momentum, the Government stressed **that reforms should not alone be** promised but should be implemented without further delay or equivocation. The Government pressed their views with the authorities concerned and on the 23rd April the then Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Frank Aiken, went to New York on the instructions of the Government to brief the Secretary-General of the United Nations fully on the situation in the North. With the increase in inter-communal tension and widespread fears that the promised reforms would be delayed or circumvented, the apprehensions of the Government grew.

Government's Warning about 12th August

The Government's fears in recent weeks were accentuated by the reports of the likelihood of an escalation of tension in Derry city. On the 1st August the Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Patrick Hillery, went to London to see the British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary in order to bring to his attention the Government's grave concern at the possibility of widespread disorder and bloodshed during the Apprentice Boys' Parade in Derry on the 12th August. The Minister pointed out that the holding of the parade would be provocative in the extreme in view of the very tense situation already existing in the city. He urged on behalf of the Government of Ireland that the march should be cancelled or at least restricted to a safe route. He also urged that if, despite the Government's views, the march was allowed take place it should be limited to the usual small number of bands (about 17) instead of permitting over 70 bands to participate as proposed.

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The Minister was informed that the parade would be allowed to take place on the grounds that the authorities were in full control of the situation.

Breakdown of law and order in the North

Evidence of the sound basis of the Government's apprehension was shown by the increasing polarisation of the two social groups in the major cities and towns in the North. On the 3rd August there was **rioting** in Belfast and at least 80 people were injured. In the succeeding days Catholic families were forced to leave their homes in Belfast and elsewhere.

In spite of additional urgent appeals made to the Stormont Cabinet by civil rights, political and other minority leaders, the Apprentice Boys' Parade took place in Derry on the 12th August. Unionist members of Parliament participated with the approval of the authorities.

This extremely provocative parade in a predominantly nationalist city was followed by rioting on an unprecedented scale. Rioting continued for three days and led to a complete breakdown of law and order. On the night of the 12th August large numbers of civilians and police (R.U.C.) were injured. For the first time ever in Britain or Ireland the police used tear-gas in riot control.

Taoiseach's Statement

On the evening of 13th August the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Mr. John Lynch, spoke to the nation on Radio and Television on the situation in the North. The main points in his address were:-

The Irish people throughout Ireland have expressed their concern at the recent tragic events in Derry and elsewhere in the North. This concern is heightened by the replacement of the spirit of reform and inter-communal co-operation by the forces of sectarianism and prejudice. The Government and people are apprehensive of the future. The Government have been patient and restrained over several months past.

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The views of the Government were made known to the British Government and care taken not to exacerbate the position but the present situation cannot be allowed to continue.

The Stormont Government evidently is no longer in control of the situation which is the inevitable outcome of policies pursued for decades by them. The Government of Ireland can no longer stand by.

It is obvious that the R.U.C. is no longer accepted as an impartial police force.

The employment of British troops is unacceptable and not likely to restore peaceful conditions.

The Government of Ireland have requested the British Government to apply to the United Nations for urgent despatch of peace-keeping force to the Six Counties and the Irish Permanent Representative to the United Nation has been instructed to inform the Secretary-General of this request.

The British Government have been asked to see that police attacks on the people of Derry cease immediately.

Many injured do not wish to be treated in Six County hospitals so Irish Army authorities have been instructed to establish field hospitals in Donegal and other points on the Border where necessary.

Recognising that reunification of Ireland **provided** the only permanent solution of the problem, the Government intend to request the British Government to enter into early negotiations to review the present constitutional position of the Six Counties.

All pray that the present situation will not deteriorate but end soon by granting all in the Six County area full equality of citizenship and by the eventual restoration of the historic unity of our country.

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Continued deterioration of the situation

On the 13th August the situation continued to deteriorate in Derry, particularly when the police tried to force their way into the Bogside area. The police continued to use tear gas; a part of the city was set on fire. Rioting spread across the North to Dungiven, Enniskillen, Strabane, Dungannon, Omagh, Coalisland, Newry, Lurgan, and Belfast. The authorities called into action the **Ulster Special Constabulary** (B Specials) numbering about 10,000 heavily armed men. The fears of the Government of Ireland were proved only too well founded. The complete breakdown in confidence between a section of the population and the police, and the use of the B Specials, an armed partisan force, had led to the stage where British troops ultimately had to intervene.

Next day at the request of the Stormont authorities the British Government sent in troops on the grounds that the United Kingdom Government **has ultimate responsibility for the protection of those who live in Northern Ireland "when as on this occasion the break-down of law and order has occurred"**.

Visit of Minister for External Affairs to London, 15th August.

On the instructions of the Government, the Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Hillery, went to London again on August 15th. He saw Lord Chalfont and expressed the Government's grave concern at the situation. He put forward the Government's proposals for a solution to the immediate problem; either a United Nations peace-keeping force or a joint Irish/British force. The use of British troops was not acceptable to the Irish Government. Once the British troops were withdrawn, there had to be an alternative to a return to the situation where the police, and the "B Specials" would simply attack one section of the community.

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With regard to the long-term situation, Dr. Hillery put forward the Government's view that there should be consultations between the Irish and British Governments on the constitutional position of the North. These proposals, were rejected.

Dr. Hillery made two further suggestions to the British Government which were not rejected out of hand. They were the introduction of immediate and significant reforms in the field of civil rights and the disarming and disbanding of the B Specials.

Street fighting in the North

On the 14th August the violence intensified. Large-scale street fighting broke out in Belfast, Armagh, Newry, Portadown and other Northern centres. In Derry agreement was reached between the community leaders and the British troops. Police and B Specials withdrew. An uneasy peace was restored. The Bogside area was cordoned off, but not entered by the troops.

In Belfast bitter fighting was provoked by the use of the "B Specials". Hospitals reported large numbers of casualties and at least six people were shot dead during the fighting, five in Belfast and one in Armagh. On the following day fighting continued in Belfast and ^{over 400} casualties were treated in hospital, many for gun shot wounds. British troops were again introduced in their second major involvement to restore law and order in the North. A further 600 were flown in from England.

Appeal to the United Nations

Because the British Government refused to request a United Nations Peace-keeping Force or to consider a joint Irish/British Peace-keeping Force, the Government of Ireland decided that the situation in the North of Ireland should be urgently raised with the United Nations Security Council, and that a request be made direct to that body for a United Nations Peace-keeping Force.

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The Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Hillery, left Dublin for New York on the 16th August in order to meet the United Nations Secretary-General, U Thant, with a view to inscribing the question on the agenda of the Security Council.

Defence Force mobilisation

As a result of the Government's decision, announced by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) in his broadcast on 13th August, the Irish Army Medical Corps established five field hospitals and two refugee centres in Border areas. These were set up as a practical and humane act to care for refugees and to treat those injured in the North who do not wish to be treated in Six County hospitals and who fear arrest. The hospitals have to-date treated.....people..... people are being cared for in the refugee centres. The Minister for Finance is making funds available for the relief of victims of the disturbances. The Minister has held discussions with The Irish Red Cross.

On the 16th August mobilisation of the First Line Reserve of the Defence Forces was authorised in order that sufficient forces would be available for peace-keeping and domestic duties. It is the strong desire of the Irish Government that Irish troops should participate in whatever type of peace-keeping force may be decided on.