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11th July, 1971

News Report of a Statement issued by the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Sunday 11th July, 1971.

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"A meeting of the Parliamentary Party of the SDLP was held in Derry to discuss the current situation. The party heard a full and detailed report from Mr. John Hume MP on his investigation into the tragic death of two young men as a result of British Army action.

"We are completely satisfied that Mr. Hume's call for an inquiry into the circumstances of these deaths is fully justified and will reveal that the statements of the British Army and Stormont Prime Minister are untrue. We now reiterate our demand for an impartial inquiry. The importance of a refusal to agree to an inquiry should not be underestimated, and will pose some questions which are of far-reaching political consequence.

"The first question posed has to do with the role of the British Army in Northern Ireland. "Has the role changed substantially? We have on record the statement of the Stormont Prime Minister on 25th May that the British Army could shoot on suspicion, a statement later withdrawn because of the strength of our protest. Is shoot on suspicion now the reality? A second, and more important question, relates to our role as elected representatives.

"If, in a situation as serious as we now find ourselves, a demand for an inquiry into events which have outraged our constituents, a demand we feel to be justified, is not granted, then what is the justification for our role within the present system? "We would point out that throughout the extremely turbulent and difficult period through which our community had gone we have at all times done our utmost to give responsible leadership.

"We have urged continuing restraint, we have opposed any attempts by our supporters to protest on the streets, and we have fought doggedly in Parliament to have meaningful reform in order to create the conditions for justice and peace in our society".

The party said that in spite of the ever-increasing doubts in its mind strengthened by the actions of those who formed the present Government of Northern Ireland and the inaction of the British Government, it had continued its struggle in a responsible and parliamentary manner, even to the point where in the eyes of those it represented it was carrying some of the responsibility for the unjust system which it had been trying to change.

"There comes a point where to continue to do so is to appear to condone the present system.

"That point, in our view, has now been reached. We can no longer continue without clear evidence that our wishes and those of the people we represent are respected.

"In short, we are now publicly questioning the determination of the British Government to proceed in an impartial manner towards a political solution of our problems.

"The military role of the Army has always been a temporary one. Their impartial role has now clearly ended. There can be no military solution. Even the GOC admits that.

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 "The British Government must now face up to the clear consequences of their intervention of August, 1969, and reveal their determination to produce a political solution which will be meaningful and acceptable to those we represent.

"Without such evidence we cannot continue to give our consent to a continuation of the present system, which has resulted in deaths of innocent people, and which if allowed to continue, must inevitably lead to further tragedy.

"Our demand for an inquiry is a decisive test of the sincerity and determination of the British Government.

"If it is not granted, then as publicly elected representatives, we will respect the logic of our position, which is that there is no role we can usefully play within the present system.

"If our demand is not met by Thursday next - exactly a week after the deaths of the two young men - we will withdraw immediately from Parliament, and will take necessary steps to set up an alternative assembly of elected representatives to deal with the problems of the people that we represent, and to become the authoritative voice to negotiate a political solution on their behalf, and we will call on all our parliamentary colleagues to join with us."