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Title: Letter from Seán Ronan, Assistant Secretary at the Department of External Affairs, to NS Ó Nualláin, Secretary of the Department of the Taoiseach, providing material for responses to Dáil Questions to be asked of the Taoiseach regarding the situation in Northern Ireland.

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Seo n fhreagra chun :-
(Address any reply to:-)

AN RÚNAÍ
(The Secretary)

faoin uimhir seo :-
(quoting :-)



AN ROINN SHÓTAÍ EACTRAÇA
Department of External Affairs,

BAILE ÁTA CLIAË 2
Dublin, 2.

26 Eanáir 1971

An Rúnaí ~~Nóibhíoch~~
Roinn an Taoisigh.

I am to refer to your minute S.9361 X of 21st January concerning the following questions (Provisional Nos. 207, 218 and 219) put down by Deputy L'Estrange for answer on Wednesday next (as amended):

Question No.207

To ask the Taoiseach if he is prepared to make an appeal to all concerned, in an effort to bring peace and stability to people of the Six Counties.

Question No.218

To ask the Taoiseach if he has had any recent communication with the Northern Ireland Government; and whether he is aware that armed raiders are using the 26 Counties as a base for their incursions into the Six Counties and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Question No.219

To ask the Taoiseach if it is his intention to reactivate the cross-Border talks between members of his Government and the Northern Ireland Government.

Question No.207

The Taoiseach has on occasion appealed for calm and patience in the North. Such appeals lose their force if repeated too frequently.

No doubt this question is inspired by the recent Ballymurphy riots and attendant circumstances; it was put down before the Shankill Road riots of the past weekend. Mr. E. Gallagher was in Ballymurphy on the night of Saturday/Sunday 16/17 January in order to try to assess the situation in that area. It appeared to him that there were two situations which needed to be disentangled.

(i) In Ballymurphy itself the riots began because of resentment against certain activities of the British Army in that neighbourhood. These activities included the creation of a discotheque to which girls in the neighbourhood were invited and from which the boys were excluded; and picture shows at the Battalion Headquarters on the rim of the area to which, once again, the girls were invited and the boys kept out. It could be maintained, therefore, that the riots began because of the insensitivity of the British Army about the likely reaction of Ballymurphy to this kind of behaviour.

(ii) Later it is quite clear that the Provisional IRA kept the riots going and it was stated to him that the Regular IRA also intervened. The Provisional IRA are alleged to have been responsible for placing incendiary bombs in a number of Belfast stores.

*Taoiseach.
Proposed
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YH*

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When it became clear that the propaganda campaign mounted by Unionists, including even "liberal" Unionists, against Ballymurphy was both unfair and dangerous and appeared to be intended to induce the British to take massive reprisals against Ballymurphy and to convince them also that trouble in the North stemmed simply and solely from minority intransigence and Republican irredentists, the Minister for External Affairs instructed that the ^{British} Ambassador be advised of our view of the matter and be further advised that repression was not the answer to the situation and that the Government's general policy of reconciliation would be endangered by any such response.

The rioting last weekend in the Shankill Road supports our point of view as it demonstrates that the causes of tension in the North are not due simply to Republican extremists or to the population of Catholic ghettos.

On Thursday evening, January 21st, the SDLP issued a statement condemning violence and the swing to the right in the Unionist Party; it also called for discussions between local community leaders and the security authorities in regard to policing.

There is attached an extract from the Irish Times of Friday last containing the statement.

On the other hand, Mr. Brian Faulkner's speech on Saturday night to the East Down Unionist Association in Downpatrick, before the Shankill Road riots got under way, clearly reveals his belief that attributing riotous conditions in the North to Republican extremists would now influence British public opinion in favour of some kind of Unionist hard line. There is attached an extract from today's Irish Times which quotes the speech.

Last Saturday's Irish Times carries a report of a speech made by Mr. Roy Bradford, Minister of Commerce, to the North Antrim Unionist Association in which he said that the present conflict in the North was nakedly political, without a hint of Protestant/Catholic confrontation (extract enclosed). This also illustrates the advantage Unionists have attempted to acquire out of the Ballymurphy situation but, of course, falls down in the light of the Shankill Road riots at the weekend which began with the usual, almost ritual, harassment of Unity Flats.

It is important to note this new trend in statements by leading Unionists as, if they succeeded in representing the situation to British public opinion as simply an anti-British Army attitude on the part of the minority communities, they might hope to be allowed to return to repression of these communities.

In reply to the question under reference, therefore, the Taoiseach might wish to make a number of political points in something like the following manner:-

*

X Recent rioting in various parts of Belfast demonstrates the urgent necessity for creating conditions - social, economic and institutional - which will convince the general population that peace with justice will prevail. Community problems in the North are deep rooted and will only be solved by the exercise of great patience and sensitivity on all sides over a long period of time and by a proper appreciation of the cultural and political personality of the minority.

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I would support the statement made last week by the Social Democratic and Labour Party urging that the security forces should have regard to the views of local community leaders on policing.

This latter paragraph might be used, if the Taoiseach desires to make such a reference, either in response to the main question or in response to a supplementary.

Question No.218

This question, in its amended form, has been discussed with the Department of Justice. The reply to the first part of the question is of course in the negative. So far as the second part of the question goes the Department of Justice consider that the form of the question should bring about a refusal to allow it on the ground that it is argumentative in its imputations. If it is allowed in the present or another form, however, the Department of Justice information, from the Garda Síochána, is that the imputations are totally incorrect and they would recommend a formula which would simply deny bluntly these imputations.

Question No.219

There is a considerable amount of contact at administrative level between North and South. Ministerial contacts have been minimal for some time but resumed recently in the form of correspondence between the Minister for Local Government, Mr. R. Molloy and the Northern Minister for Development, Mr. Brian Faulkner in connection with a cross-Border drainage scheme.

It seems that the lack of Ministerial contact results from a de facto situation rather than deliberate decision - at least on our side. Its resumption will depend on circumstances and how things go in the future. Consequently a form of reply the Taoiseach might use could run as follows:-

There is no objection on our part to cross-Border Ministerial contacts on matters of mutual interest as and when they arise.

In reply to a supplementary the Taoiseach might refer to the recent correspondence between Ministers but without necessarily saying which Ministers.

Seán B. Ronan

th.c. Rúnaí