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PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIALBRITISH EMBASSY,  
DUBLIN.

2/4

24 May 1971

The Taoiseach, Mr J Lynch, TD  
DUBLIN*↳ des Taoiseach.*

I have been instructed to ask to see you about the present situation and recent events in Belfast. I understand that you can see me at 4.30 p m tomorrow (Tuesday, 25th) and will look forward to calling upon you then. In the meantime you may find it useful to see the enclosed account that I have received, with commentary, upon the events of the 20th and 21st May.

If you find that you have an opportunity to see me sooner and think that an early discussion would be useful, I am of course at your disposal at any place and time.

*Yours sincerely  
John Peck*

John Peck

Enc: (1)

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

BELFAST, 20 and 21 May

1. The sequence of events began with the funeral of the IRA gunman William Reid. The organisers had been prevented by the army from firing volleys, wearing uniform, or carrying weapons. Thus frustrated they were intending to stir up further trouble.

2. At lunch-time on Thursday, 20th May rumours were being circulated that Catholic employees were being sacked at Gallaher factory for taking part in the funeral; and that two Catholic women were held hostage by Protestant workers.

3. Catholic councillors personally investigated these rumours inside the factory with the management and established that they had no foundation in fact. The crowds outside, which included known trouble-makers, refused to accept the assurance of the councillors. During the afternoon of the 20th the army was twice withdrawn completely from the area in the hope that the crowds would disperse and normality return. On each occasion a remnant of the crowd that remained harassed Protestants moving in and out of the factory. This became serious when work ended, missiles began to be used, and the crowd sought to close with Protestants emerging from the factory. It was therefore necessary to make arrests, and when some of these were violently resisted and soldiers were kicked and struck, it was necessary to use the amount of force required to effect the arrests. Four soldiers were injured in the process.

4. During a lull the unit commander twice addressed the crowd by loud-hailer asking them to disperse. However they returned to the charge, more arrests had

consequently to be made, and the streets were clear by 1830 hours. Of the 29 persons arrested, 2 were Protestants, and a number of Catholic juveniles and a woman were released.

5. There was a further incident at Gallahers' factory at lunch-time on the following day (21st) when a Catholic crowd attempted to molest Protestant workers emerging. Twelve arrests were made, in the process of which the occupants of the Starry Plough Bar were taken to the local police station for identification. No Members of Parliament were detained.

COMMENT:

- (i) In the sequence of events starting with the attempt by Reid and his associates to shoot British soldiers, no action has been taken by the British authorities to impede any legitimate form of protest or to uphold any form of intimidation or discriminatory practices
- (ii) On the contrary, on this occasion the precautions taken by the Army at the funeral and their firm action on the 20th and 21st were the only things that stood between the minority and massive inter-communal violence throughout the city, with potentially disastrous consequences for the minority.
- (iii) Membership of a minority cannot carry with it immunity from normal obligations regarding lawful assembly and resistance to arrest. Anyone hurling missiles and violently resisting arrest must expect the

necessary force to be used upon him, whether by the army or police or other guardians of the law, in any country. This principle is valid regardless of race, religion or political opinions.

(iv) It is the aim of professional agitators who are interested in obstructing a peaceful solution in Northern Ireland to obscure the vital distinction between legitimate forms of protest against grievances, and violent opposition to forces whose aim is to see that justice is done. By using murder as a political weapon the IRA are seeking, as on this occasion, to stir up communal strife and hostility to the peace-keeping forces.

(v) It would therefore be a great service to the cause of peaceful evolution in Northern Ireland if minority leaders, and their friends, could themselves use their influence to make this distinction clearly understood and persuade their followers to act accordingly. Their real enemies are the gunmen of the IRA Provisionals, whose activities have been roundly condemned by responsible opinion on both sides of the Border.