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**Reference Code:** 2003/17/335

**Title:** Letter from Padraic Mac Kernan, Deputy Consul General in the Consulate General of Ireland, New York, USA, to Joe Small, First Secretary in the Anglo-Irish Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs, enclosing a policy statement, and 4 February, 1972, relating to the events of 'Bloody Sunday', 30 January, 1972, issued by the British Information Services in New York. This policy statement consists mainly of the account of the events provided by Lord Balniel, Minister of State for Defense , in the House of Commons on 1 February, 1972.

**Creation Date(s):** 17 February, 1972

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 7 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of Foreign Affairs

**Access Conditions:** Open

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POL. 14/3/5

AIR MAIL CONFIDENTIAL

17th February 1972

Mr. Joe Small,  
Anglo Irish Section,  
Department of Foreign Affairs,  
Dublin.

Dear Joe:

Further to our telephone conversation of today I enclose herewith copies of two documents viz. a policy background statement dated February 1st, 1972 and a policy statement dated February 4th relating to the events in Derry on 30th January issued by the British Information Services in New York.

Of these the policy background statement of February 1st is the basic document used by British publicists to explain away the shootings in Derry and to claim that the killings resulted from an exchange between the British Army and "attacking gunmen and bombers." Lord Cromer, in his television appearance on the "Today Show" on January 27th, 1972, relied heavily on this statement. We also note that it was used by the British High Commissioner in Canada in a briefing session given by him to Canadian journalists and ~~prime ministers~~.

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Perhaps you would be good enough to pass on copies of these documents to Noel Dorr and to other officers concerned. We are sending copies to Charlie Whelan in London and to the Embassies at Washington and Ottawa.

Done  
D 21/2

Yours sincerely,

*Padraic MacKernan*

Padraic MacKernan  
Deputy Consul General

PMacK/jc  
Encls.

*Mr. Flavin*

Send copies of  
enclosures to Mrs. Quigley and in plain  
envelopes to Charles Hill  
and S. Hume, pl.

T.S. 21-2-72



# BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES

## POLICY AND REFERENCE DIVISION

February 4, 1972

POLICY STATEMENTS

5/72. NORTHERN IRELAND: DEBATE ON EVENTS IN LONDONDERRY

Lord Balniel, Minister of State  
for Defence, in the House of  
Commons on February 1, 1972:

On February 1 the House of Commons held an emergency debate on the events of Sunday, January 30, in Londonderry, during the course of which 13 men lost their lives and 21 people, including five soldiers, were injured.

The Minister of State for Defence, Lord Balniel, gave the House an account of the events leading up to the tragic confrontation, reports of which, he pointed out, "conflict wildly."

The march had been organized in deliberate defiance of the legal order which banned it, the Minister told Members. He continued:

"It culminated in an exchange of fire that led to a number of people being killed and injured, and ... the Prime Minister announced today the Government's decision to set up a highly authoritative independent inquiry into the circumstances of the march and the casualties which resulted..."

"We very much hope that all who have allegations will find it possible to attend and give evidence before this impartial inquiry."

Lord Balniel repudiated the "most serious allegations" which had been made against the conduct of the army.

"... However urgently the inquiry is conducted, some time is bound to elapse before the evidence can be collected and weighed. It is not right that the Army's case should go by default when

/bitter, ...

bitter, intemperate and, to the best of my belief, inaccurate or untrue statements have been made against it... The IRA is waging a war not only of bullets and bombs but of words ... a highly skilled war of propaganda, in which corpses, the unutterable sadness of relatives, the confusion, the gullibility and downright lies are all brought into play."

The security forces, said Lord Balniel, are trying to fulfil their task in incredibly difficult circumstances under orders to use no more force than is necessary to preserve order.

Although the pattern of events in recent months has shown the continued ability of IRA terrorists to wreak havoc and destruction, there has been a change of tactics as a result of the disruption of its command structure.

"If we analyse the recent activities of bombers and gunners we do not see a picture of growing strength but rather one of growing desperation. The continuing build-up of information has enabled the security forces to form a clearer picture of the organizations, tactics and whereabouts of the IRA...

"Some areas of Belfast which were previously largely under terrorist domination have now become nearly trouble-free. In other areas where the IRA has been particularly active in the past, its command structure has been disrupted.

"So the IRA has changed its tactics. It has recently concentrated its efforts on what are described as the 'soft,' the 'easy' targets -- the police or the Ulster Defence Regiment man in his home. Three policemen were murdered at the end of the last week, one in Londonderry. Another policeman had his legs amputated today as the result of an explosion."

Lord Balniel went on to show how civil rights marches held in defiance of the legal ban on all processions play into the hands of the IRA.

"The IRA has also concentrated on hit and run attacks and ambushes from the safe haven across the border...

"IRA men have developed the deliberate use of crowd covers, either mixing themselves up amongst demonstrations or causing explosions amongst the general public in shopping areas. From behind the general public, who are, of course, often quite innocent of any evil intention, they mount attacks against the security forces. This is a new pattern of IRA techniques. © National Archives, Ireland

"Civil rights marches suit the IRA's tactics and purposes well -- not just because of their propaganda value but also because they give it a chance to create further trouble."

The Minister of Defence reiterated the importance of the continuation of the ban on all public parades and marches, which was introduced last August at the urging of the Catholic community.

"After repeated appeals by Catholic leaders, from both north and south of the border, a six-month ban on marches was imposed by the Northern Ireland Government... The Northern Ireland Government, again with the full approval of the British Government, have announced their intention to extend their ban.

"The reasons for the ban are obvious. Marches by whichever community are likely to be provocative, as we have seen in the past. They stir up counter-demonstrations and lead to outbreaks of inter-communal strife. The task of controlling marches diverts the security forces from what I regard as their priority task of hunting down the terrorists, and marches can be used as a screen behind which gunmen can operate..."

Lord Balniel pointed out that it was known in advance that two attempts at marches were to be made during the weekend of January 29-30, and the army had issued a statement emphasising the dangers involved.

He went on,

"Intelligence information had given the security forces good reason to believe that the IRA would exploit the opportunities afforded by the march and subsequent rioting to mount attacks on the security forces."

He then gave the House a comprehensive account of the course of events.

Marchers began to gather in the Creggan at about 2 p.m., the Minister related. When they set off on a tour of the Creggan and Bogside their numbers rose from about 800 to some 3,000. At this stage the march was well marshalled.

Troops from the three resident Londonderry battalions were manning a number of barriers inside the edge of a Catholic area, in particular in the area of William Street. It had been decided that no action was to be taken against the marchers unless they tried to break through barriers or to direct violence against the troops.

"The marchers reached the barrier in William Street, east of the junction with Rossville Street, just before 3.40 p.m. There was a brief discussion between the march leaders, the Army and the RUC. The leaders began to move off, but stewards were unable to keep control and large groups of trouble-makers started to throw stones, bottles, steel bars and other missiles -- including canisters of CS -- at the troops manning the barriers in the area.

"Water cannon were used [by the army], and the bulk of the crowd moved back to the open ground around Rossville Street, leaving behind a hooligan element still attacking troops at the barriers. At this stage troops used CS and rubber bullets against the rioters.

"By five minutes past four the crowd in Rossville Street was largely dispersing. There was clear separation between the rioters and the barricades and the remaining marchers in the area.

"There had, however, already been two incidents foreshadowing the terrorist violence which was to come. At 3.55 p.m. a high-velocity round was fired across William Street from the direction of the Rossville Flats [i.e. a block of apartments], striking a drainpipe four feet above the heads of a party of soldiers. A few moments later a man was seen preparing to light a nail bomb in William Street. He was shot as he prepared to throw, was seen to fall, and was dragged away by his fellows.

"Between 4.05 and 4.10 p.m., the Brigade Commander ordered the 1st Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, to launch an arrest operation against the rioters, who ... were well separated from the marchers. These rioters were flagrantly breaking the law: hurling missiles at the troops and establishing a degree of violence which was quite unacceptable...

"The Parachute Regiment, the Belfast Reserve Battalion, had been deployed to Londonderry as a precaution, and had been kept behind the line of barriers for use in this way in case it was needed. Three companies of soldiers therefore came through the barriers in William Street at about 4.15 p.m. They fired rubber bullets when necessary. It is the noise of these rubber-bullet firings which ... I believe is the reason why many of the marchers who were well away from the area believed that the army opened fire first.

"The soldiers continued to arrest the rioters whom they had chased. They had arrested about 28 in a matter of a few minutes. At the same time, they came under fire from gunmen, nail bombers and petrol bombers, some in the flats and some at ground level. Between 4.17 and 4.35 p.m. a number of these men were engaged. Some gunmen and bombers were certainly hit and some almost certainly killed. In each case, soldiers fired aimed shots at men identified as gunmen or bombers. They fired in self-defence or in defence of their comrades who were threatened. I reject entirely the suggestion that they fired indiscriminately or that they fired into a peaceful and innocent crowd.

"I also reject utterly the slurs made on the Parachute Regiment... There has been a sustained campaign against the Parachute Regiment in the last week or two. Suggestions have been made that soldiers in that regiment are less sensitive to the needs of the situation than other groups. We have heard suggestions that their discipline broke down over the weekend. I believe both those suggestions to be totally without foundation... They are part of a deliberate propaganda campaign to vilify individual regiments. At one time the vilification campaign was directed against the Scottish regiments. At the moment it is being directed against the Parachute Regiment.

"The soldiers in that regiment are in fact a very experienced battalion, having been in Northern Ireland since September 1970. They have nearly completed their tour of duty as one of the resident battalions. They are more experienced than most soldiers in Northern Ireland and they are very well versed in the circumstances under which troops may open fire. They are well-disciplined, and their Commander and the Government have every confidence in them."

Lord Balniel then told the House that this particular battalion has an excellent reputation for establishing good community relations. As an example he mentioned that the men had pooled their savings to send 100 children from both communities abroad for a holiday.

The Minister concluded his speech by reiterating that the British Government do not believe that a purely military solution is possible to the problems of Northern Ireland.

/"We ...



"We must get on with the talking, and the key to talks lies in the hands of leaders of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. When they are ready to enter into discussions without rigid pre-conditions, we are ready likewise to do so."

(Prev. Ref. 4/72)

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