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*Mr M. Canally Mr Hussey X.P.2 has been ordered from Govt. Bookshop
to Belfast J.H.
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7.10.76*

Stormont Castle
27 September 1976

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR ROY MASON MP,
AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN STORMONT CASTLE TODAY:

"I have only been here two weeks and so far I have been listening. One must have a great capacity to do that in Northern Ireland - words pour from politicians like the constant cascades of mountain streams, with the press mills waiting in the foot hills to churn them out for public consumption.

"On my arrival I decided to see the Police first. The RUC is the legitimate and genuine force of law and order. It is undergoing reorganisation under its new Chief Constable: recruitment is good, morale is high and effective arrests are being made.

"I hope everyone will recognise the difficult task they have, and give them every encouragement where possible. Ultimately these are the people upon whom the people of Northern Ireland will depend to enjoy peace and tranquility.

"Next I met the Trade Union leaders - representatives of ICTU, whom I found to be a mixture of youth, energy and wise counsel. That was followed by a meeting with the CBI - a team of management who have more than their share of industrial problems.

"It was right to see representatives of management and men so soon. For, whatever the wave of terror, the bombings, the discriminate and indiscriminate killings, these are the people who have to ensure that the wheels of industry are kept turning and that all is not lost at the basic level of Northern Ireland economy.

"I am extremely worried at the poor state of Northern Ireland's economy. The questions of unemployment, lack of new investment and businesses closing down must receive priority. Instructions have been given to all Ministers to pay personal attention to them.

"One must feel shocked at the effects on a township of 29% unemployment; of no jobs for school leavers; of a weekly bomb blitz on homes, shops and factories; and the whole social structure of life in danger of collapse.

"Peace, democracy and personal well-being is being denied these people, and for all their sakes it just cannot go on.

"I was born in the twenties. I was bred on unemployment in the thirties. Eleven out of 20 men were unemployed in Barnsley, my home town, prior to the war, and memories of those days will never be erased from my mind.

70 } "Therefore, in this context, I attach particular importance to working with both sides of industry. A meeting has been called of the Economic Council for 15 October. It will be the last meeting in its present form, but I hope at that meeting a working party will be sent up to make recommendations for reshaping the Council. A major report will be before us, making a serious and detailed examination of the economic scene. It is not a Government document but one prepared by Northern Ireland Civil Servants with inputs from university study groups. It is a notable study which will be worthy of in-depth consultation by all parties to find some solutions to Northern Ireland's awful economic problems. In the meantime the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU will be meeting the Prime Minister. I'm sure they will be registering much of what I have said.

"Security is, of course, a matter of prime importance. The stability of any society depends on respect for the rule of law. The law must be actively enforced and impartially enforced and the Police, with the help of the Army, will have my full support in this.

"The Army has been involved in Northern Ireland's security affairs for seven years. They have an unenviable task, which they do with great restraint, and one shudders to think what Northern Ireland would be like today had they not been here. The Army will remain - in whatever strength is required for as long as the situation demands.

Let no one be under any illusions about that.

"I have now had my first full round of talks with seven political parties. All stressed the need to maintain law and order; all wished to see continuing emphasis on the Government's will to win and defeat terrorism; there was general recognition and approval of the RUC's achievements; they registered disquiet about unemployment, public expenditure cuts, and the loss of subsidiary companies.

"I have noticed in the past few weeks the "reconnaissance" that took place between SDLP and Official Unionist Party; Mr Harry West's letter to the Prime Minister and the SDLP statement - all indications of political party activity, searching for a role to play and for devolved Government solutions.

"Let me emphasise that Direct Rule will continue determinedly and decisively. All Ministers will spend more time on the job - visiting establishments and showing that there is noticeable, direct Government.

"However, our aim of devolved Government remains.

"People talk about a political vacuum here. My impression is that of a political whirlpool. There are so many swirling for solutions. It is early days for me but I will prove a sympathetic listener to any devolved Government ideas.

"Finally, we have seen tangible evidence in recent times of the widespread yearning throughout the community for an end to the violence and for the restoration of normal life everywhere.

"I wonder when those responsible for the violence will learn that it achieves nothing and it can never pay. The Government will not be moved by it and the people are increasingly rejecting it. These criminals of violence and terror are torturing their own people, their own land and damning the future of this beautiful country.

"They must be rejected and there are some glimmerings of hope. First of all there is the Women's Peace Movement; then there is the Trade Unions campaign to develop "a better life for all"; the continuing successes of the RUC; the improved co-operation on the Border against terrorism; and the improved anti-terrorist legislation from Dublin.

"I am certain the ordinary people of Northern Ireland are asking for peace - to have a quiet night's sleep; the freedom to wander throughout any street; to see their kids grow up without a blanket of fear shrouding their lives - the simple decent aspects of life one enjoys in a democracy.

"The ordinary people of Northern Ireland have carried on, no matter what the terrorists and extremists have done. The industrial wheels still turn; the shops are still open, and of course the printing presses still churn out the news. And that too is why there is hope."