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10 January 1978

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Reve confully filed 48 12/1 THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE RT HON ROY MASON MP. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, LAST NIGHT (MONDAY 9 JANUARY 1978):

I have now studied the text of the statements relating to Northern Ireland made by Mr Lynch on Sunday. During the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in October of last year a clear understanding of each Government's position was established. I am therefore surprised and disappointed by the unhelpful comments on Northern Ireland made by Mr Lynch.

The British Government's policy in respect of Northern Ireland which has the support of the major parties in Westminster is based on the following principles. Firstly, that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom for so long as the majority of people there so wish. Secondly, it is our aim to establish in Northern Ireland a fully devolved Government and Parliament. Thirdly, we want to see more of the government of Northern Ireland being conducted by locally elected representatives and the main parties at Westminster are agreed that any development of the present system must be one which both sides of the community can support and sustain. HNG are not committed to any particular arrangement as the only way of achieving this support and stability. Fourthly, I do not think that anyone in Northern Ireland has any doubt about HMG's commitment to the Province.

I do not need to repeat the list of important measures which I have introduced over the past year with the sole aim of improving the economic and industrial position within Northern Ireland.

The people of the Province, on both sides of the community, are in no doubt that there is no question of economic withdrawal. Nor is there any risk that the level of troops, who are in Northern Ireland in support of the RUC in their fight against crime, will be altered in any arbitrary fashion. Where appropriate, they can be reduced in strength as the situation improves; where appropriate they can be reinforced at short notice.

In the task of seeking out terrorists and bringing them before the Courts, the RUC and, let us not forget, the Garda need all the support and encouragement which can be offered. Talk of amnesty for those convicted on carefully gathered evidence presented before the Courts can do nothing but give succour to law-breakers.