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Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Mr. James Prior, M.P. to the House of Commons on
Monday, 21st November, 1983

At approximately 6.15 p.m. yesterday at least three men armed with automatic weapons entered the Mountain Lodge, Elim Pentecostal Gospel Hall near the village of Darkley in Co. Armagh. They opened fire in the entrance hall killing two church elders and fatally wounding a third whom they then followed into the Gospel Hall itself. There the gunmen opened fire on the congregation of between 60 and 70 people including about 20 children. Seven members of the congregation were injured, two seriously. The gunmen then ran outside, fired another 25 shots at the congregation through the outer walls of the hall and then fled. None of the congregation had any connection with the security forces. Responsibility for this appalling attack has been claimed by a body calling itself the Catholic Reaction Force. One of the weapons used had previously been used in incidents for which the Irish National Liberation Army has claimed responsibility. The whole house will join me in extending our sympathy to the families of those killed and seriously injured. It will also share my horror and disgust at this outrage. Though in the course of the fourteen years campaign of terrorism endured by the people of Northern Ireland there have been other incidents involving greater loss of life, none before has involved the cold blooded murder of people at worship. The shooting show the true nature of terrorism and the true nature therefore not only of those who perpetrated but also of all those who advocate and support it. The universal condemnation they have received from all sides of the community and from all parts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland shows in full measure the revulsion which this hideous act has aroused. The Government of the Republic has given the strongest possible assurances of its full cooperation in pursuing those responsible. The RUC assisted by the army is determining to arrest the murderers.

Mr. Powell: May I ask the Secretary of State two questions?

The Government are saying that they are determined to arrest the murderers. How can they do that if the murderers are in another jurisdiction, or has the Government received an assurance from the Irish Republic that those who are wanted for this murder will be extradited. Secondly, while bearing in mind the fact that there cannot be a saturation of any area indefinitely by the security forces will he do his best to ensure that where as in the case of County Armagh there is an indication that a definite set is being made upon a sector of the frontier, that part of the frontier is so saturated with the security forces that movement by Terrorists becomes virtually impossible.

Secretary of
State

On a certain point of course I am in close touch with the General Officer Commanding and the Chief Constable and obviously one we will have to see what else one can do in that particular area of County Armagh with the, as it were, the Dundalk corridor which was causing us so much trouble at the moment and I must tell the right honourable gentleman that I had a long talk with the GOC and the Chief Constable only yesterday on these matters. As far as extradition is concerned of course I can't answer for the Government in the South. All I can say is that as far as the North is concerned we will do all that we can to catch the murderers and we would hope very much that if they are caught in the South that they will be extradited and ~~our~~ ^{these} grounds for thinking that the Republic Government takes the same view of this issue.