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CONCLUSIONS OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD AT STORMONT CASTLE ON MONDAY, 6TH JANUARY, 1969, AT 2.30 P.M.

PRESENT:- The Prime Minister
 The Minister of Commerce
 The Minister of Finance
 The Minister of Home Affairs
 The Minister of Education
 The Minister of Agriculture
 The Minister of Development
 The Minister in the Senate

ALSO PRESENT:- The Attorney-General
 The Chief Whip

The Secretary to the Cabinet
 The Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet
 The Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

The Deputy Inspector General, R.U.C.)
 County Inspector Corbett
 County Inspector Cramsie
 County Inspector Meharg
 Deputy Inspector Wood
) (for item 2)

1. MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT

On behalf of all his colleagues the Prime Minister welcomed Major Neill on his first attendance at the Cabinet as Minister of Development.

2. THE SECURITY SITUATION

Ministers reviewed the course of the People's Democracy March to Londonderry and the events which followed it, the current situation in Londonderry itself and the prospects for the future.

The senior police officers present outlined the circumstances in which the police had temporarily withdrawn from an area of Londonderry, which was being controlled by an organised and armed force. They explained that considerable strength, possibly even involving the use of firearms, would be required to re-enter the area in the current atmosphere, and that thereafter it would represent a major continuing policing problem. Accordingly it was their advice that other means of resolving the situation should first be attempted. The general view of Ministers was that this situation could not be tolerated for more than a very brief period, as there were grave dangers that others would take their cue from a failure to enforce police authority. They agreed, however, that in the short term the police

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must use their own discretion in seeking the best method to solve the problem.

Ministers considered the adequacy of current legislative powers and generally took the view that any review of the Public Order Act should include consideration of more stringent penalties, clearer powers to deal with counter-demonstrations, and effective sanctions against those who participated in banned processions as well as the organisers.

The Minister of Finance said that he had the greatest confidence in the police, but wondered whether an investigation of allegations against them by an outsider would not be more effective than a domestic inquiry. Ministers generally, however, were satisfied with the form of inquiry already set on foot.

Consideration was given to the strength of the police force in the light of possible future developments. It was agreed that the regular force would have to be further supplemented both by mobilisation of Special Constables and by a more extensive use of non-mobilised Specials on a patrol basis.

The Minister of Home Affairs explained in detail the way in which the People's Democracy march had developed. Ministers generally expressed their full support of the way in which this most difficult situation had been handled, although the Attorney-General considered it unfortunate that summonses had not been issued at the earliest opportunity against those who, in impeding the march, had clearly been guilty of unlawful assembly and probably of other offences also.

Consideration was given to the advisability of banning future marches, taking into account the general view of the police that such bans were frequently unenforceable. There was considerable support for the proposition that, whatever the attitude to other types of demonstration, further marches lasting 3-4 days simply could not be tolerated.

The Minister of Home Affairs asked whether his colleagues would approve of his meeting Mr. John Hume, if he considered this would achieve useful results. It was agreed that the Minister should feel free to meet with any person who might contribute to an improvement of the current grave situation.

Finally, Ministers approved for immediate release a statement which is attached to these conclusions.

James O'Neill