

NOTE OF A MEETING IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S ROOM, STORMONT CASTLE

AT 10.30 A.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 22ND APRIL 1970

It was attended by

The Prime Minister
The Minister of Home Affairs
Sir Harold Black
General Sir Ian Freeland
Lt Col Lilleyman (GSO 1)*
Mr. J. V. Morrison

** Present during U.D.R. discussion only.*

The Prime Minister thanked the G.O.C. for his attendance and stressed how much he appreciated what the Army had done and was doing to help keep the peace in Northern Ireland. The task was an extremely difficult one and no one recognized that more than he did himself but the fact remained that research into the loss of two seats in the recent by-elections had pointed clearly to a lack of faith in the Government's ability to maintain law and order and a lack of confidence in the U.D.R. as an effective replacement for the U.S.C.

He knew the G.O.C. would like him to speak plainly and indeed ~~the~~ circumstances demanded that he should do so. He had been concerned that the Army had not taken firm counter-measures when first attacked in the Ballymurphy area; at reports, no doubt in the main untrue, that soldiers had refused to investigate alleged crimes in certain areas and as recently as Monday when the BBC and the Belfast Newsletter had reported that a joint foot patrol had been taken out of Rossville Street in an Army vehicle having been stoned by a gang of youths. He wondered if the G.O.C. felt in any way inhibited in taking decisions because of policy decisions or orders emanating from London.

General Freeland replied emphatically in the negative and went on to say, vis à vis incidents of the Ballymurphy kind, that things tended to start in a low key and it was considered right to tackle the situation using minimum force

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in the hope that ^{the situation} ~~it~~ would not escalate; the alternative was aggressive action right from the start, a course more likely to make matters worse than bring them to a satisfactory conclusion. He assured the Prime Minister that despite any rumours there might be to the contrary, the Army can and does go anywhere in Northern Ireland and that fact had been made clear in repeated public statements. On the Rossville Street incident, the facts were that the men were not withdrawn but continued to patrol the Bogside area. Assistance was sent for in the hope of apprehending the youths concerned but they had disappeared into the flats and houses by the time the reinforcements arrived and even if the platoon concerned had forced entries in an effort to find them it would have been fruitless as they could not have been identified.

As the Prime Minister clearly recognized, the Army had an extremely difficult job to do and Ministers could rely upon them to do their best. It had to be borne in mind however that while the soldiers could restore order, maintenance of the law was a police function and he appreciated the difficulties under which the police were operating. He saw the Army as the vehicle in which the R.U.C. could travel to "public acceptability".

The Minister of Home Affairs stressed the importance of apprehension of wrong-doers. While he appreciated the circumstances at Rossville Street and the outcome, which the GOC had described, incidents of the kind did give rise to public criticism in that they ~~are~~ ^{were} seen as evidence that the Army and the Police ~~can~~ ^{could} be attacked with impunity. He urged that in areas where such incidents ~~are~~ ^{were} more likely to occur, a mobile support unit should be on stand-by and know exactly what to do.

General Freeland said the Army's task was made even more difficult by the fact that in such areas they received little or no support from the people living in them who seemed all too willing to offer shelter to the wrongdoer. Once in-doors, the problem was whether to pursue and risk widespread disturbance or not. Also it had to be borne in mind, though it would not deter the soldiers in

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carrying out their duty, that any such event would be broadcast around the world and the T.V. camera had a remarkable facility for seeing a part rather than the whole of an operation.

The Prime Minister said he had every sympathy for the Army in the problems it was facing but unless the problem of law and order could be resolved the political situation would rapidly deteriorate, ~~and the evidence available to it~~
~~degraded the news reporting and the~~.

General Freeland said that basic to the whole problem was the R.U.C. Time was needed before the new police methods would be given general acceptance and the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators of explosions would help matters enormously. The burdens placed on the Army were heavy ones and to them, processions were the main contributor. At the Easter week-end some 9000 men were on duty round the clock. To cover the Bogside area a 50 strong Military Police Unit had been created, a force stronger than the R.U.C. in that locality. All he could say was that the Army was doing and would continue to do its best.

Turning to the U.D.R. the G.O.C. dealt with various points raised by the Prime Minister and about which he had been informed in advance. He went on to say that 5832 applications had been received to date of which 3349 had been accepted, 601 rejected and the balance were going through the vetting and medical processes. The operational strength of the Regiment stood at 2425. About 200 weapons were being kept at home but within an approved ceiling of one-third of total establishment more would be kept at home ^{if} when circumstances required it.

Discussing the question of force build-up General Freeland said that the main problem was distribution. Complaints were made, for example, about the Fermanagh Battalion being under strength yet a stop had been ordered on enlistment of approved recruits. The reason for it was quite straightforward. While it was true that the Battalion as a whole was under strength a number of platoons were

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fully recruited and could not accept any more men. There was a surfeit of men coming forward in some areas and a serious short-fall in others. There was a need to be satisfied that the latter situation could only be remedied by recruiting men from other areas who would be willing to travel. Such considerations took time to resolve and he would hope that the majority of volunteers would show greater patience than the Company Commander at Kesh who, within a month of vesting day, had announced his intention to resign "because he was not getting the men."

There was no stop on applications in Fermanagh (which totalled 568 to date) but there had had to be a temporary stop placed on enlistments for the reasons he had explained.

It was agreed it would be beneficial if a senior Army officer were to give a briefing ^{on the U.G.F.} to Ministers and Government back benchers ~~on the U.D.R.~~ and the good progress that is being made to produce an effective locally recruited defence force. General Freeland undertook to provide the Prime Minister with a deployment map and details of the strengths they were aiming at in the different areas.

The Minister of Home Affairs referred to the correspondence he had had with the Secretary of State for Defence and with Mr. Roy Hattersley concerning the size of the Regiment. The G.O.C. had indicated that the aim was in the region of 5000 and he would find it difficult to accept such a figure in the light of the Joint Working Party's recommendations. The G.O.C. said that as far as he knew, no final figure had been set but he was working to 5000 and given that number of effective men (he doubted if in terms of effectiveness the U.S.C. ^{had been} ~~was~~ as strong as 5000) and the fact that 250 would be mobilised for full-time duties with the Regiment, he felt that they would be in a position to do anything that would be asked of them. The Minister of Home Affairs said there was a direct relationship between the size of the force and the demands which

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might have to be placed on the individual members of it. His fear was that limited to 5000 they might prove excessive and he would hope to convince the Secretary of State of the merits of going for 6000 and working down if experience demonstrated it to be on the high side, rather than the converse approach.

The Prime Minister said that the U.D.R. must be seen to be doing the kind of job that the U.S.C. had been responsible for in the past and asked the G.O.C. if urgent steps could be taken to bring them more into evidence. Following discussion General Freeland undertook to see what steps could be taken in that direction. He pointed out, however, that one of the difficulties they were up against was that the U.D.R., unlike the U.S.C., looked like any other soldier of the Regular Army or the TAVR. *when seen in the streets was liable to be thought of as a member of the Armed Forces rather than of the locally recruited U.D.R.*

The Prime Minister thanked the G.O.C. and the meeting closed.