

CONFIDENTIALIRISH Republic

Text of Speech to be made by Captain O'Neill
in the Northern Ireland House of Commons - 28th June 1966

M. Le Henman

The events which we discussed in this House on 15th June were in all conscience serious enough. But what we now have to consider is now far more grave and grim. Human life has been wantonly taken. We are confronted by terrible acts which have shown no mercy to youth no respect for old age. Our first duty in this House today is to condemn absolutely and without one shred of reservation this evil thing in our midst. To those who have been killed and injured our utmost sympathy is due. Those who have lost their lives were our fellow citizens. Violence against them was violence against us all.

I do not think the House will expect me to describe in detail the terrible events of early Sunday morning. It is enough to say that four young men were wantonly and wickedly attacked, leaving one dead and only one uninjured. Since then police activity has been intense. Once again the Royal Ulster Constabulary have shown a firmness and efficiency to which proper tribute must be paid. During last night two men were charged with the murder of Peter Ward and three men with the murder of John Patrick Scullion. Other charges have also been made and nine men have appeared in court today, eight of them have been remanded in custody. Police inquiries are continuing and further arrests are expected. The law will now take its course and it is not for us to say anything which could prejudice the impartial verdict of justice. Nor do I think that prolonged further debates at this time would really serve the public interest.

The Government however is not prepared to let the matter rest there. Information which has come to hand in the last few days makes it clear that the safety of law abiding citizens is threatened by a very dangerous
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conspiracy, prepared at any time to use murder as a weapon. This we cannot and will not tolerate. I said in this House on 15th June that "the Government intend to keep the peace without intimidation from any quarter". In fulfilment of that intention my rt. hon. Friend the Minister of Home Affairs has this morning made regulations under the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland) 1922 to declare an organisation which has misappropriated the title "Ulster Volunteer Force" an unlawful association.

As hon. Members may know I flew back last night from France. The purpose of my visit there was to honour the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division, many of whom were members of the authentic and original U.V.F. Let no-one imagine that there is any connection whatever between the two bodies— between ^{those} ~~they~~ who were ready to die for their country on the fields of France and a sordid conspiracy of criminals prepared to take up arms against unprotected fellow citizens. No; the organisation takes it proper place alongside the I.R.A. in the schedule of illegal bodies. We will not hesitate to act in a similar way against any group or organisation, however styled, which plans to do violence to the fabric of society.

I call upon those who may be connected with these people in any way to turn back before it is too late. One cannot touch pitch without being defiled. I warn those who set their ends before the interests of the community that the Government, acting in the best interests of all, will move against them with rigorous severity.

We stand at the cross roads. One way is the road of progress which has been opening up before us with all
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its promise of richer and fuller life for our people. The other way a return to the pointless violence and civil strife of earlier years. We must not let anyone push us down that road. For myself I do not seek the political company of anyone who would condone or justify recent events in the slightest degree. I will not stand idly by and see the Ulster which we love dragged through the mud. Every person who has a shred of influence has a duty to use it wisely and responsibly. Above all else I appeal for a spirit of calm and restraint. If we were to experience a wave of reprisals and counter reprisals the consequences could be grave indeed for us all. The battle against these evil forces must be waged throughout the community; but it must begin here in this House today.