



Monday, 21st April, 1969.

NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT

MR. JAMES CALLAGHAN

Use of Troops to Safeguard Certain
Key Installations in Northern Ireland

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement. In the early hours of yesterday morning two serious attacks were made on important public utility installations in Northern Ireland. An electricity pylon was damaged by explosion, and trunk water mains were blown up seriously reducing the supply of water to many thousands of homes. Last evening the Northern Ireland Government requested the assistance of military units stationed in Northern Ireland for the specific purpose of supporting the local police in safeguarding certain key installations essential to the community. Her Majesty's Government immediately authorised the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland to give such assistance, and troops are today being posted to safeguard certain installations in remote areas mainly electricity and water supply installations.

I am sure the House will join with me in condemning these outrages against the life of the community.

As the House is aware, it has been intended to resume our discussions with the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland following the recent General Election there. Captain O'Neill today agreed to finalise this appointment, and

I expect a meeting to take place at a very early date.

I shall of course continue to keep the House informed on progress in these matters.

E.R.

Northern Ireland

Background Notes

Legal authority

1. The legal authority for the use of troops to guard installations in Northern Ireland derives simply from two rules:

first, "A person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime" (Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 section 3 (following section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 of the United Kingdom);

second, under common law it is the duty of every person to come to the assistance of the civil authorities to maintain law and order if called upon to do so.

2. Military personnel are under no higher or lower obligation than any other citizen in these respects.

3. When the military are employed in aid of the civil power, it is the responsibility of the commander of the force employed to decide what force is necessary to deal with the particular situation. [He would be legally liable if he used excessive force but would be failing in his duty if he used inadequate force.]

Possible Military Reinforcements

4. At present there is no question of sending reinforcements from Great Britain, or of standing any by.

Police from Great Britain

5. It is not the intention to send police reinforcements from Great Britain. We are dealing with an urgent situation and the troops concerned are already there.

Post Offices

6. There has been no suggestion so far that the military should guard post offices.

E.R.

Northern Ireland Police

7. The regular Royal Ulster Constabulary is fully stretched. The duty involved is not thought by the Northern Ireland Government to be one on which the Special Constabulary could practically be employed.

Orders to the Troops

8. It is well recognised that the use of force should be limited to the absolute minimum for the discharge of the task of protecting the installations.

Diversion of Troops to Riot Control

9. It is clearly understood between the two Governments that if any question arises of using troops to assist in dealing with public disorder there will be prior consultation between them. The use of troops in aid of the civil power is governed by the common Law. No question has arisen of the use of troops for this purpose. The request was specifically confined to the guarding of key installations.