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Northern Ireland

Law and Order: Relationships

Some of the problems involved in handling internal security questions depend on the relationships, both official and personal, of those involved. This note sets out to describe them. There are three main people involved: the Minister of Home Affairs, the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the General Officer Commanding.

Although the "responsibility" for security operations rests with the General Officer Commanding, who obviously is responsible to the Defence Secretary, the Minister of Home Affairs retains a responsibility to the general state of the Northern Ireland Parliament for the Queen's Peace in Northern Ireland and in particular for the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Minister, Mr. Porter is a quiet, honourable lawyer, a politician ^{against} his will, with a strong and somewhat literal conscience. He has a deep sense of duty but no more than an ordinary breadth of vision.

The Chief Constable, Sir Arthur Young, is a very distinguished policeman with a marked capacity for leadership and a dominating personality. His assumption of this thankless duty represented a very high sense of public service. He is fretful over administrative delays and impatient over opposition from the Ministry of Home Affairs to his plans. I judge he would react in no very different way if he were dealing with the Home Office. Save that, I venture to think that we take a rather broader view than the Ministry of Home Affairs.

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Sir Arthur Young having been appointed on Mr. Callaghan's suggestion naturally looks to us for guidance, and is often here to discuss his problems as well as to pursue general police interests in Great Britain. Mr. Porter (and the General Officer Commanding) think he is away too often and Mr. Porter resents his "running to the Home Office". It is hard to do more than try to live with this rather awkward situation. For all that, Mr. Porter and the Northern Ireland Government know how much they owe to Sir Arthur Young and there is no doubt that they greatly value him. The difficulties are at the margin.

The General Officer Commanding (General Sir Ian Freeland) is a very talented soldier (he is nicknamed "Smiling Death"), urbane but strongly resolute, with the sense common to all soldiers that the man on the spot should be allowed to get on with it, but with a penetrating insight into internal security problems and their political significance. His feeling is that the Royal Ulster Constabulary, under Sir Arthur Young, have gone much too far towards a passive attitude to their duties in case of disorder and that his soldiers are having to take on far more of a police role than he thinks is proper, or advisable if he is ever to get his soldiers off the streets. Sir Arthur Young has been making it his object to retrieve the battered image of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and to turn it into a police force of the English kind "non-aggressive", as he puts it and "non-retaliatory". His philosophy is that when disorder gets rough it ceases to be a police responsibility and becomes one for the military.

The Northern Ireland Government are much taken up with the question of law and order and often complain that not enough is done to maintain it. They say more arrests should be made and more in general should be done to suppress disorders. They rather agree with the General Officer Commanding that the Royal Ulster Constabulary are not prepared to go far enough, but the military are not always immune from their criticism.

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It was recently decided between Major Chichester-Clark and Mr. Callaghan that the respective roles of the police and the military should be examined, and we have a paper which would if the Northern Ireland Government agree serve as a basis for this examination. We will not trouble the S. of S. with this at this point; he would no doubt prefer to see how the land lies before considering the matter. If the Prime Minister or the General Officer Commanding raises the matter (the Chief Constable is unlikely to) the S. of S. may wish to show he is aware of the problem; and it would be wise not to become committed too firmly to agreement with any propositions as to the role of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in case of disorder that the Chief Constable may put forward. Our own view is that the Royal Ulster Constabulary ought in the long term to be prepared to use all necessary force (and of course no more) to deal with disorder; otherwise we shall never get the troops away. We shall suggest that the Royal Ulster Constabulary should study the tactics of handling disorder in Northern Ireland and not be content with the tactics that are used for London crowds.

Against this general background the S. of S. may care to look through the attached document by Sir Arthur Young that he gave us last week.