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JIC(A)(69)(UWG) 29COPY NO. 118th August 1969UK EYES ONLY

CABINET

JOINT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE (A)

ULSTER WORKING GROUP

The following is an assessment made by the Ulster Working Group at their meeting at 4.00 p.m. on 18th August 1969.

Incidents in Northern Ireland

1. The past week has seen the most serious disturbances in Northern Ireland since the 1920s. There have been incidents all over the province, but they were particularly serious in Londonderry and Belfast. Trouble in Londonderry started on 12th August (see JIC(A)(69)(UWG) 28 of 13th August 1969). Rioting continued for three days and nights. The police, although they used tear gas, were unable to disperse the crowds. Troops were called in on the evening of 14th August. The situation immediately became quiet. Riots broke out in Belfast on 15th August, and there were some serious outbreaks of shooting. Troops moved into the Falls Road and Shankill Road areas that evening, and into the Ardoyne district during the night of 16th August. Fighting then subsided into scattered incidents. On 17th and 18th August the province was comparatively quiet. Eight people have died so far and many hundreds have been injured

Incidents in London

2. The most serious of the several incidents in London since 12th August was the demonstration outside the Ulster Office on Sunday 17th August; a petrol bomb was thrown; considerable damage to property was done in the vicinity of the Ulster Office, and subsequently there was some damage elsewhere. It was evident that hooligan, mainly non-Irish elements of the extreme left (Trotskyite, Anarchist and Maoist adherents) had taken firm control of the demonstration and were mainly responsible for the disorder and damage.

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The Republic of Ireland

3. The reaction by the Government of the Republic of Ireland to the disorders in Northern Ireland was the subject of a recent Special Assessment by the Western Europe Current Intelligence Group (JIC(A)(69)(SA) 62 of 15th August), which has been circulated to all recipients of this assessment. Since then, the Republic of Ireland Representative at the United Nations has formally asked that the matter be discussed by the Security Council.

IRA Involvement

4. It is clear that the Londonderry disturbances were sectarian in origin. However, we know that this was the sort of situation which it is IRA policy to exploit, and that they have long planned to infiltrate the Civil Rights Movement. There was some evidence of organisation among the Londonderry rioters. We have no direct evidence of the extent of IRA activity during the Londonderry riots, but we have strong suspicions that the IRA were involved.

5. There is some evidence of co-ordinated planning in the Belfast riots, for example the almost simultaneous use of firearms against the police in different parts of the city. A study of the troubled areas has not yet indicated the emergence of any identifiable leadership but it is known that armed Republicans and IRA units are active there.

6. The IRA has made a number of public statements in the Republic. The Chief of the IRA is reported as admitting that his organisation has been "giving leadership, helping with stones, petrol bombs and other traditional methods of defence". The Sinn Fein has called for support for the campaign of violence in Northern Ireland. Volunteers were told to make their way to Dundalk where they would be supplied with equipment and transport. The equipment and transport did not materialise but a number of the volunteers made their way to the border where they were detained for questioning by the RUC. Press reports suggest that this incident was a diversion to cover a genuine IRA movement. There are a number of reports some of which are considered reliable that IRA units

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have concentrated in County Monahan and in the Dundalk area and that the IRA plan to attack Newry, Armagh and other places near the border. The RUC have interned a number of known extremists, mainly members of the IRA.

International Links

7. Extremists in London have established liaison with Northern Ireland Civil Rights leaders. Known London Trotskyites are trying to obtain international support for demonstrations; some foreign students were seen to be active in Londonderry.

Protestant Extremists

8. A group of seven Protestants were arrested in Belfast for firearms offences. Two Protestants were arrested for firearms offences in County Antrim.

(Signed) N.R.L. BRISTOW  
for Secretary,  
Joint Intelligence Committees

Cabinet Office, S.W.1  
18th August 1969

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