

ADJOURNMENT

LONDONDERRY DISTURBANCES

Motion made and Question proposed,
That this House do now adjourn—[Mr. Magowan.]

3.09 p.m.

Mr. Hume (Foyle): In rising to speak I am very conscious of the fact that this particular institution is probably more irrelevant at present than it has been for 50 years. Those who come to the House with the duty of governing have failed miserably and the events of the weekend have simply shown that this community has not had government for some time. Since we came here we on this side of the House have said many things. We have repeated many things. We have even been accused by right hon. Gentlemen opposite of being repetitious. We said that we repeated our statements in order that—it is a phrase of my own—the penny might drop. The penny did not drop, and the result was the events of the weekend.

We have argued that the only way to govern a community is with the consent of the governed, not by increasing the powers of Ministers or of the police. We have said that the underlying social and economic grievances, which are the root cause of recent disturbances, will have to be tackled. In one of my early speeches here I said that this community was approaching the brink, and that if some action were not taken to remove grievances we would go over the brink.

The explosion in Derry at the weekend was not expected by anyone. From statements by hon. Members opposite since then, and from their attitude before, it is clear that the gap between the two sides of the House, the gap about which we have talked, is as wide as ever. In fact, I am quite confident that some hon. Members opposite believe in their hearts that some of us on this side of the House actually participated in the organisation of some of the troubles. That is how far out of touch they are. The gap is so wide that not one member of the Government appeared in my city, which was a disaster area, at the weekend to have a look. We were having statements about the causes of this

H.C.—21

houses—if we cannot provide accommodation that is really up to standard. This has not been the case in many places in the past.

I should like it to be made quite clear by the Minister—I hope the Press will take up what he says and broadcast it widely—that it is his aim and that of the Tourist Board that staff accommodation shall be brought up to the highest possible standards in order to attract the best possible type of staff, thereby improving the quality of our tourist industry and of the service that is rendered to the public who visit Northern Ireland. I would hope that in the passing of this affirmative Resolution we may find the Minister is very ready to go back over all applications made since 1963 so that we can see that the accommodation is improved as much as possible.

3.07 p.m.

Mr. Bradford: I, as much as the hon. Member for Oldpark (Mr. F. V. Simpson), am very well aware of the need to provide staff accommodation up to the very highest standards at all our hotels, boarding-houses and guest-houses. It is an essential part of getting good staff and keeping it; I appreciate that. The hon. Member will find that there will be no necessity for us to go over all the previous schemes which have been grant-aided. Those establishments which are not grant-aided are now empowered under this regulation to come to us and get grant-aid where, within an acceptable development scheme, staff accommodation forms the major part of the scheme or represents a separate scheme in itself. If they came to us with a separate scheme for staff accommodation then we would afford them the same

Mr. V. Simpson: No limit to the grant? If a hotelier has already a sum he can come back and should go?

Mr. Bradford: He can make application for another scheme—a separate scheme.

Mr. V. Simpson: put and agreed to.

[Mr. Hume]

and that, but no member of the Government came to see for himself. It was left to the rest of us to work almost 24 hours a day to keep the peace and end the bloodshed.

The Government are not governing. As we have said repeatedly, they are intent on the struggle within the ranks of their own party. The Prime Minister accused his opponents of putting party before community. That is what he has done over the past four months. He is putting party before community and refusing to accept his responsibility to govern. The consequences must be laid at his feet, and at no one else's.

I could talk at length. I could distribute blame. I know what happened in Derry on Saturday, and the people of Derry know. And we know what has happened since. I am not, therefore, going to spend time hurling blame around. In the present tense situation what we need is clear honesty and moral courage on the part of everyone. All I intend to do is to state the facts of the situation as I see them. I accept that my views may be coloured by my involvement in certain events.

As I see it, the confidence of a very large section of the community in law and order has broken down completely. This is particularly because people have been led to believe that by arming themselves with firearms and clubs supporters of the Government are capable of preventing others from exercising their democratic rights. While the Government refuse to do their moral duty and disarm those people no one can be responsible for controlling the situation.

Confidence in law and order has broken down also because of the fact that some members—I do not say all members—of the force which is responsible for maintaining law and order allow their personal political and religious prejudices to colour their attitude to their duty. These prejudices express themselves in actions which are horrifying in 1969.

I visited a family yesterday. How can we control the community when a lady living with her daughter and young son is wakened at three o'clock

in the morning by a bullet, fired by a member of the peace-keeping force, going through her fanlight? I have the bullet here. It may well be said that the officer was under extreme provocation, but in riotous situations it is irresponsible, given the views that we know many of them hold, to have policemen armed. One must understand the natural reaction of people to this sort of thing.

Members of the police force have actually entered people's homes and attacked them at their firesides. They attacked a family in my constituency. They broke the door down with a plank. The evidence is there for all to see. The father was beaten to the ground. He was not involved in the trouble; he was standing at his door. He has 22 stitches in his head and serious stomach injuries. His 16-year-old daughter, who had just come out of hospital, having had ulcer and appendix operations, was beaten around the back and legs with batons. She is covered with bruises and has had a medical examination. There is clear evidence of this if the Minister wishes to investigate it.

The 20-year-old son was beaten on the head, and the 18-year-old daughter was struck repeatedly on a toe, which had to have medical attention. A neighbour threw himself across three children, aged 12, 10 and five, to protect them. They were in the room. One can imagine the feelings of children when this sort of thing is happening. The man who was protecting them was beaten on the head, and the children were covered by his blood.

I am not trying to over-dramatise the situation. I am asking this House to understand the reaction of people when this sort of thing happens. Neither am I absolving from blame any group of throwing vandals who did damage to persons and property in my city on Saturday last.

This is not the first occasion in that area, on which the forces of law and order have shown that their impartiality is in question. On Sunday, 22nd, it appeared to everyone to be the same. Had it not been for the actions of Members on this side of the House...

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of responsible citizens of the city there would be a state of war today. It is nothing short of a miracle that it was averted.

In short, the situation is very serious. A whole section of the community has lost confidence in law and order. The situation is far worse than it would have been had hon. Members opposite listened to what we had to say. We said that grievances should be dealt with. We asked whether it was moderate and progressive to deny the universal franchise and to have the horrifying legislation which is the Special Powers Act. We said that if these things were dealt with now—that was some months ago—the community could return to stability and the Government could get on with the job of governing. But they were not dealt with. Everything was allowed to drift, and the explosion was inevitable.

On Sunday, after a horrifying weekend, civil war was about to erupt. Individual citizens were doing what they could to avert it, but not one member of the Government appeared. It was what would have been described in another country as a state of disaster. If there had been an earthquake in that area every one of them would have been there, but perhaps they put their political lives before the lives of the people. Not one of them came to see what happened.

Instead we had statements; hysterical statements that it was a master plot of the I.R.A. I have been involved in the civil rights movement since its inception on 5th October and I can say with all the sincerity at my command that in the organisation of any demonstrations with which I have been involved the I.R.A. has had no part to play.

What happened at the weekend was a completely spontaneous eruption. There was absolutely nothing planned about it. It arose out of the tension over the proposed events for the weekend at Buncollet Bridge. There was nothing planned about it, and for this community to get hysterical, for people to rush to the trenches from which they have shown their toes for a few years is madness at this point of time. This is simply untrue.

All I have to say is this: for too long in this community people in positions of responsibility have feared to do what is right because it might not have been politic; they feared to do what was right because they might not have held support among those who support them. In short they have lacked moral courage. It is about time that hon. Members opposite stood up and were counted.

We are not asking them to stand up to be counted in favour of anything extraordinary; we are simply asking them to stand up and be counted for justice. If they stand up to be counted for justice the extraordinary measures that the Government seem to think are necessary for the preservation of law and order will be totally unnecessary.

There are two approaches to law and order. One is repression; the other is to examine the causes of it and to deal with them. All history shows, and we have said this time and time again, that the only way to deal with grievances which cause serious disturbances is not to repress those who are trying to draw attention to them, but instead to deal with the grievances. We have said repeatedly, and it can be read in HANSARD, that to repress in any way only causes further reaction. In short, persecution only strengthens the convictions of those who are persecuted and they will not back down in the face of any advance of it.

What is wanted is moral courage; what is wanted is for people to forget about their party political lives in this situation; what is wanted is for people to realise that at this time we would appear to be like Nero—fiddling whilst the community is burning; what is wanted is people, particularly those who have power on the opposite Benches, to stand up today and be counted for justice and to realise that they are afraid of offending some supporters by taking action they know to be right. In other words, if they put politics before the interests of the community then they are only contributing to disaster. What is wanted today is for every hon. Member in this House to realise what politics are about—they are about the lives of people, and the lives of people in this community are in danger today.