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Mr. Shillington

Mr. Hamill

Mr. Hamill

Stormont Castle
Belfast

29 April 1977

NIO/4/9

Mr. Hamill

For a plea.

*See p 4/5 on
total strength of security forces.*

SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE RT HON ROY MASON, MP,
AT LUNCHEON OF BELFAST JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, 1 PM, FRIDAY 29 APRIL 1977.

May I say, first of all, how very pleased I am to have this opportunity of meeting you and your guests today. There is a tremendous admiration in the rest of the United Kingdom for the way in which you in business in Northern Ireland have kept the wheels of industry and commerce turning throughout a long period of very great tribulation and difficulty. I hope you will continue to do so and I would like to assure you that I will do everything in my power to assist you in carrying on in spite of the activities of those who seek to bring the business life of this community to a standstill. They will not succeed.

The courage, enterprise and perseverance of the trade unions and management in Northern Ireland have deservedly won unstinted admiration and praise throughout the United Kingdom and abroad. I wish to pay my own tribute to them for all they have achieved.

When I came here first as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland I was determined to make every effort to secure stability and progress in the economic and industrial fields. For that reason my first concern was to meet with the employers' organisations and with the trade unions to see how best we could in partnership put the Northern Ireland economy on its feet and achieve increased employment and an increasingly high standard of living.

I make no bones about it: I look on it as my job to fight Northern Ireland's case in Cabinet and, together with my Ministers, to do all I can to help to improve the economic health of the Province, particularly by maintaining employment and

by encouraging industrial expansion by local and overseas companies. The job is not an easy one because in an era of public expenditure constraints it is often a struggle to achieve special measures for Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, you will have heard of the very important order which we have achieved within the past couple of days for the Belfast shipyard of Harland and Wolff. In the face of intense competition the order to build two liquid petroleum gas carriers worth around £60-£70 million will ensure employment for the Yard for a considerable time to come.

I recently gave the go-ahead for work to continue at the Kilroot Power Station which will save more than 1,000 jobs which would otherwise have been lost. I have secured the support of my Cabinet colleagues in the retention of the Selective Employment Premium for Northern Ireland when it was being abolished throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. In so doing, I estimate that approximately 10,000 jobs have been preserved in Northern Ireland which might otherwise have been lost. I have argued for and obtained a considerable reduction in the cuts which were being demanded in public expenditure from all Departments of Government, and, as a result, we have only had to make a token cut of £5 million where it might well have been expected that we should contribute some £30-£35 million. I have also maintained and continued the meat industry employment subsidy which has been very important in the agricultural life of Northern Ireland. I have listed a number of positive achievements but I most certainly do not claim to be a miracle worker who has managed to do all this on my own. I have been assisted in great measure by the sympathy of my colleagues in Cabinet for Northern Ireland and all it has suffered and I have also been assisted by the international reputation which you have here for workmanship of the highest quality and a remarkable record for skills in industry and good labour relationships. I very much hope that the rumours and threats in recent days of industrial action in support of some ill-defined objective does not, if it takes place, create a disastrous lack of confidence in Northern Ireland as an area for development.

It would be a tragedy if, because of the actions of a few, we were to throw away all the benefits which we, in partnership with management and workers, have achieved against heavy odds.

I think it would only be realistic to say to you that at a time of considerable economic difficulty - which nevertheless I hope is showing an up-turn - the

people of Northern Ireland as a whole should think very carefully about the course of action which is being proposed by certain people within the next week or so.

If you as business people put yourselves in the position of potential investors outside Northern Ireland looking at this area as a possible location for investment, I wonder what your reaction would be to the incredible attitudes being struck by some of these people. They are not concerned with the problems of Northern Ireland workers. Indeed the action they propose could seriously affect the livelihood of many thousands of hard-working people in this community. No. They are purely and simply involved in an attempt to blackmail Her Majesty's Government. And leaders of the political parties except Mr Paisley and Mr Baird realise this. That is to say that Harry West, Bill Craig, Jim Molyneaux, Olivier Napier, Gerry Fitt, Anne Dickson and many others have unanimously opposed disruption whatever their other differences. Very many more leaders of influential and wide-ranging group within the community, including the Orange Order, the CBI, and NIC-ICTU, have also recognised just how barren and bleak a future the UUAC holds out for ordinary people. And they too know that Mr Paisley and Mr Baird, if they have their way offer not the prospect of a prosperous and united society for which so many have worked for so long. All they can do is increase the fear, the distrust, and the insecurity which have cast their shadow over this province for too long.

It is alleged that the threatened strike is in protest against the Government's security policy. But I wonder how closely those who are urging action to bring the country to a standstill examine that policy and the constant and careful refinements and reviews which help to shape it. I am not complacent about the present situation nor are any of those responsible and senior officers in the Army and the RUC who advise me on it.

Let me say quite clearly that I have the utmost confidence in and respect for the Chief Constable of that very fine police force, the RUC, Mr Kenneth Newman, and for the General Officer Commanding in Northern Ireland, General Sir David House. I believe that they, like me, are concerned to do their utmost to secure the safety of persons and property throughout Northern Ireland and they have my full backing in that task. It is conveniently ignored that through their efforts the level of violence in the first four months of this year has been very considerably reduced. I repeat, I am not complacent. I have every sympathy with people who are concerned about the security situation but you and I must see some progress in the fact that the number of people killed in the first four months of this year as compared with last year is cut by half. There has been a similar reduction in the number of people injured and the number of bombings and shooting incidents have dropped very substantially. I repeat, there can be no complacency about this. I will only be satisfied when there are no killings, no bombings and no shootings but that is a situation which we can only achieve by holding fast to our policy of giving full backing to the RUC, acting with the support and partnership of the Army, in enforcing the rule of law and giving to the community the necessary confidence in the determination of the security forces as a whole to act impartially and for the good of all of the people in the Province.

Great progress has been made. The operations of the SAS have contributed much to the gathering of intelligence about the actions of terrorists. They have been invaluable in assisting the RUC to charge and bring before the Courts some of the most dangerous men in the Province.

Over 300 people have been so charged since January 1 this year and this total includes 12 of the senior organisers of violence. Two other terrorists were not charged - they were killed.

There are many other positive steps - the increase in full-time, professional members of the UDR and the determined pin-pointing by the RUC, by public appeal of specific people whom they believe to be involved in crime and whom they wish to question.

There are in Northern Ireland 14,000 regular troops and when we include the UDR, the RUC and the RUC Reserve the total number of men and women acting in defence of law and

order in the Province comes to 31,000 - one agent of law and order for every 50 of the population. That is a considerable strength but in the past I have not hesitated where necessary to authorise the GOC to make temporary increases in the strength of his Regular Forces. In this connection the Government is naturally preparing contingency plans. If it proves to be necessary, military specialist assistance will be on hand to under-pin essential services whose failure would cause great suffering to the community. Moreover, it has been decided that this weekend there will be a call out of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The GOC has asked for the Spearhead Battalion which is on constant standby and which has, as you know, been called into Northern Ireland on a number of occasions, to come here. It would be very unfortunate if irresponsible action aimed at disrupting the industrial and commercial life of the Province were to take place next week. That is the threat which has been put to us - not simply to me, to government and to Parliament but to you as concerned citizens of Northern Ireland. I am quite clear as to my duty. The government's concern has been to establish and sustain the rule of law in Northern Ireland in order that the citizen shall have free right of movement and freedom to live a normal life under the law. That is our objective and I most certainly do not claim that we have yet achieved it. It is a long, hard task but it will not be made easier by people who for their own reasons decide to flout the law. They may well succeed in diverting the police and other security forces from their proper task of pursuing terrorism and crime but that simply plays the game of the Provisional IRA who will undoubtedly welcome disruption of this kind. Any worker has a right to withdraw his labour. Nobody however has the right to intimidate or physically to prevent those who wish to work from doing so. It must be the concern of government to create conditions within which people may go about their lawful business free from the intimidation and brutality which characterised the previous strike in 1974. The government has no wish for confrontation with any section of the community. It is concerned to protect the life of the individual and the right of the individual to work.

If, therefore, the action which is threatened comes about - and I sincerely hope that those responsible leaders who have spoken out so courageously over the past few days will be listened to - I will take the necessary steps to try to preserve vital services for the people of Northern Ireland. I intend that we shall deal with any situation that arises with firmness and resolve. But let me be quite frank. Government can only strive to maintain the basic vital services if that becomes necessary. We can only do so much but courage and support from the community as a whole will make our task easier. None of us can afford to stand by and to see the hard won benefits which have been achieved over the past six months casually thrown away by people who place narrow political interest before the wider interests of the people as a whole.

1, as members of the community, will wish to make your own decision. If the community is prepared to allow basic rights to be trampled over by the actions of motivated men, they must be conscious of the fact that they may be helping to create a situation in which those rights cannot easily be recovered. I promise you that the Government will do its utmost; but the people must also play their part.