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NIO/5/6

Min O'Donnell
pl pr

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pm 11/5

Stormont Castle, Belfast
5 May 1977

The following statement was made in the Commons at Westminster today by the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Don Concannon, MP:--

My rt hon Friend, the Secretary of State, in his statement on Monday, undertook to keep the House informed about events in Northern Ireland. He has thought it right to stay there for the time being and has asked me to give this report on his behalf.

We are now half way through the third day since the stoppage announced by the United Unionist Action Council was due to come into effect. The first day was a day of uncertainty. A number of people did not turn up for work: these were mainly in the engineering sector of industry. The police reported numerous complaints of intimidation but most of these were telephone threats which the police were unable to check. On the second day, the turnout was better, but some of the intimidation became more blatant.

Today the indications are that the turnout for work has been the highest yet, with most firms reporting a very good attendance. Traffic is flowing freely, although the police have had to clear some road blocks (usually of telegraph poles or trees) and there have been some suspect or hoax car bombs. Although the harbour at Larne has been closed, most public services have continued to operate in a near normal fashion. Bread and milk were being delivered normally this morning.

The story of the last two and a half days is of the people of Northern Ireland behaving with courage and determination, often in the face of threats or intimidation, by firmly demonstrating their desire to work normally. In this solve, they have been encouraged and supported by the good sense and moderation of responsible leaders of opinion in Northern Ireland, including those in this House, to whom I am pleased to pay tribute. Trade union leaders, shop stewards and other workers representatives have also given courageous leadership to their fellow workers. It is these workers who are showing the bravery to protect their jobs and thereby to protect the whole future of the NI economy. I would like also to pay tribute to the RUC, who have given further demonstration - if that were needed - of their ability to act as an impartial and effective force. The Chief Constable has assured my right hon Friend that his force, supported as necessary by the army, will continue to do their utmost to ensure that all those who wish to do so can continue to go to work.

Finally to those who are understandable concerned about the continuing terrorist violence in Northern Ireland, I would repeat the message given by my rt hon Friend on Monday. We are not complacent about the present security situation. We appreciate the feelings of frustration in Northern Ireland from a community that has had to suffer so much for so long. But we are convinced that the method chosen by the UUAC and its supporters is not the way to improve matters. It distracts the security forces from their efforts against the Provisional IRA and a continuation of present tactics by the supporters of the strike will only help the terrorists.