

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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Killings in Northern Ireland by the Security Forces

1. It is for consideration whether the Minister should make known to Mr. Prior concern at the series of killings by members of the security forces in Northern Ireland since 11 November last. A total of eight men have been shot dead at road blocks or at what appears to be stake outs.

2. The details are as follows:-

11 November 1982	Jervais McKerr Sean Burns Eugene Toman	All members Provisional IRA, shot dead by RUC at a police road block outside Lurgan
24 November 1982	Michael Tighe,	Shot dead by RUC at a farmhouse outside Lurgan. His companion Martin McCauley was seriously injured. Three rifles but no ammunition found.
12 December 1982	Seamus Grew, Roderick Carroll,	Both members INLA, shot dead by RUC following failure to stop at a road block outside Armagh.
27 December 1982	Patrick Elliott	Shot dead by the Army following a chip shop robbery
29 December 1982	Kieran Leonard	Shot by the Army in Co. Fermanagh. Later charged with possession of explosives
19 January 1983	Francis McColgan	Shot dead in West Belfast by RUC following a robbery

3. In a statement issued on 30 December the leader of the SDLP John Hume claimed that a change had occurred in security policy in Northern Ireland.

He said:

"It is quite clear that a section of the RUC and British Army have now been authorised to shoot to kill anyone about whom they are suspicious. No-one objects to any person being arrested for any crime for which they are suspected, charged and brought before the courts - that is the due process of law. But to authorise their instant execution or attempted execution, as has now happened on five separate occasions in recent times, is in effect to abandon the rule of law completely and give official sanction to what is in fact legalised murder.

The consequences of such a government policy for the community as a whole are extremely serious. The continued denial by the Secretary of State that any such change of policy has taken place means that he is either misleading the community, or else that someone else is taking the security decisions. The situation calls for a clear and unequivocal statement from the Secretary of State".

4. Catholic Church leaders and other minority representatives have also criticised what they see as a change in security policy. Seamus Mallon has told us privately that he has handed over statements of witnesses to the DPP which he is satisfied are genuine, and which indicate that it was clearly the intention of the RUC to kill those who died.

5. Northern Ireland Ministers, as well as Mrs. Thatcher when questioned in the House of Commons, have denied there is any change in security policy. An NIO statement of 30 December added that "the security forces operate under the same rule of law that applies to any other member of the Community".

6. The view of Unionist/Loyalist politicians has been that statements such as that of Mr. Hume would give support to terrorists.

7. Our view is that if the security forces are believed within the minority community to be operating outside the law it makes them less acceptable to that community and provides at a minimum useful propaganda if not recruits for the Provisionals.

7. It is likely that the Minister will at some stage be asked if he has raised this matter with the British.

8. In these circumstances the Minister may wish to consider raising this matter with Mr. Prior, expressing our concern at the likely response within the Minority Community if these killings continue, and saying that, if asked, he will publicly state that he has raised the matter with the British.

Department of Foreign Affairs

28 January 1983