

solution to north's political problems

agreed they would support a proposal by the army to move one of three companies on stand-by to Musgrave Street barracks in central Belfast on a 'readiness' basis.

Consideration was given to banning all marches for a while, but it was decided that organisers of traditional

parades on both sides should be sounded out first.

An approved statement from the government warned the public: "The present disorder in Belfast threatens the livelihood and prejudices the future of all our citizens. The government will not shrink from any measure, however firm or

exceptional, which may be necessary to bring it to an end."

Following further clashes in the city, the cabinet reconvened on August 4. Ministers felt that more stringent penalties could have a salutary deterrent effect. The attorney-general and minister of home affairs agreed to consider ways of ensuring that

magistrates were aware of the need to impose more severe punishments for looting and other offences.

The cabinet agreed that, given the deteriorating situation in Belfast, police manpower would be extremely stretched by the Apprentice Boys demonstration in Derry on August 12. It was

decided that the prime minister should discuss difficulties with the leaders of that organisation with a view to securing their voluntary co-operation in order to reduce the burden on the police.

The secretary to the cabinet, Mr Harold Black revealed that a contingent request for army assistance had been withdrawn.



TROOPS IN: British soldiers move through Strabane, Co Tyrone, in April 1969. Cabinet papers released this week describe in detail the descent into violence and community turmoil

flavour' to the Commission. Mr Campbell. Black noted, was not a member of any political party. "He is regarded by his friends as a Conservative and certainly is less republican-minded than Professor Scott". The cabinet seemed unaware that JJ Campbell had written a major pamphlet, attacking the Stormont regime in the 1940s.

The fall-out from the People's Democracy march from Belfast to Derry in January 1969, and the subsequent actions of the RUC in entering the Bogside, was considered at a cabinet meeting at Stormont on January 6 1969. By then, barricades had been erected in the Bogside and a local 'citizens police' formed by John Hume and others to exclude the RUC.

At the meeting, the deputy inspector-general of the RUC and three county inspectors apprised ministers of the circumstances in which police had temporarily withdrawn from an area of Derry city which, they claimed, was "now being controlled by an organised and armed force". They stressed that considerable strength, "possibly even involving the use of firearms", would be required to re-enter the area in the current atmosphere and that, thereafter, it would represent a major policing problem.

Accordingly, it was the advice of the police that other means of resolving the situation should be attempted.

The general view of ministers was that this situation could not be tolerated for more than a brief period. Ministers felt that there should be clearer powers to deal with counter-demonstrations and effective sanctions against those involved in banned processions.



DECISIVE: Prime Minister Harold Wilson ordered the troops in

Regarding the government's decision to authorise a county inspector to inquire into allegations of police misconduct during the weekend violence in Derry, Finance Minister Herbie Kirk said he had the greatest confidence in the RUC, but wondered whether an outside investigation would not be more

effective. Ministers generally, however, were satisfied with a domestic inquiry.

The Minister of Home Affairs, Captain William Long, explained the way in which the PD march had developed. Ministers expressed their full support for the way in which a difficult situation had been handled though the Attorney-General, Mr Basil Kelly QC, considered it unfortunate that summonses had not been issued against those who, in impeding the march, had been guilty of unlawful assembly and other offences.

Consideration was given to the advisability of banning future marches. Taking into account the general view of the police trial, such bans were frequently unenforceable. The cabinet was agreed that further marches lasting three or four days could not be tolerated.

In an interesting development, the minister of home affairs asked his colleagues if they would approve of his meeting John Hume if he considered it would achieve useful results. It was agreed that Captain Long might meet any person who might contribute to an improvement in the situation.

By the next cabinet meeting on January 10 1969, the deputy inspector-general of police was able to report an improvement in the Derry situation. Detectives in plainclothes had been able to operate in the Bogside while the regular police had been able to enter the Creggan to serve summonses, which had been accepted. However, he warned that tension could flare rapidly if there was to be serious trouble at an impending civil rights march, scheduled for Newry the following day.

The imprisonment of Rev Ian Paisley and his associate, Major Ronald Bunting, for unlawful assembly dominated a meeting of the Stormont Cabinet on May 29 1969.

The PM, Major Chichester-Clark, introduced a letter from Mr Paisley, dated May 12 1969, relating to his position and that of Major Bunting under the government's amnesty for all those charged and convicted in connection with recent political protests. Mr Paisley wrote to the PM from Ravenhill Free Presbyterian Church as follows: "I would like to congratulate you on your appointment and to assure you that, in so far as in us lies, we will support your efforts in defence of our beloved province".

However, he said he was "disturbed" to learn from the Ministry of Home Affairs that, as far as the duo were concerned, "there is no scrubbing clean and that we are convicted criminals and that Major Bunting is not permitted to stand in local government elections for five years and that his council seat is forfeited".

Mr Paisley continued: "We feel if this is true we have been gravely deceived and that terrible reaction by our supporters will be the result. To me, it is tragic that such should be the case as I have sought to take the tension out of the situation as far as the loyalists are concerned."

Mr Paisley requested a meeting with the prime minister.

Major Chichester-Clark told his cabinet that the threatening tone of the letter was deplorable, but it had to be realised that if the Paisley faction returned to the streets, the entire story of street agitation might be repeated.

Westminster takes control

By Dr Eamon Phoenix

THE Chichester-Clark government was forced to undertake 'difficult and long drawn out negotiations' with the British Labour government in the wake of the August disturbances of 1969, according to cabinet papers released today in Belfast. The decision to transfer security powers to Westminster was made by the Stormont PM and his delegation without referring back to his cabinet in Belfast in conditions reminiscent of the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations of 1921.

On 20 August 1969, Major Chichester-Clark informed his cabinet that the decision to

transfer control of the police to the British GOC was a temporary measure. The control of the security forces would revert to the Inspector-General of the RUC at the end of the present emergency. The prime minister and the members of the cabinet deputation to London appreciated that in making this arrangement, they were going beyond their specific brief from the cabinet, but in the crisis they considered that no other alternative was open to them. The approval of the full cabinet for this action was sought. The cabinet approved the deputation's action and the terms of the subsequent Downing Street communique of August 19,

issued after the London conference.

However, the minister of commerce, Mr Roy Bradford considered that the terms of the agreement should have been referred to the cabinet for approval before being announced publicly and further, that the transfer of the police to the GOC represented a fundamental shift of power to Westminster.

For his part, Attorney-General Basil Kelly asked if any discussion had taken place on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland and was assured that the matter had not been discussed, save to the extent of the reaffirmation in the published declaration.

The communique read: 'In a six hour discussion the whole situation in Northern Ireland was reviewed. It was agreed that the GOC (Northern Ireland) will with immediate effect assume overall responsibility for security operations. He will continue to be responsible directly to the Minister of Defence but will work in the closest cooperation with the Northern Ireland government and the Inspector-General of the RUC. For all security operations, the GOC will have full control of the deployment and tasks of the RUC. The GOC will assume full command and control of the Ulster Special Constabulary.'

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