


 IT **II** BT IN LT DT GN NL FT ST EH AP

Date Fri 24 Jan 1997

When enough is enough

THE GOVERNMENT'S breaking point with Sinn Fein came when, on the very day its officials were meeting Sinn Fein representatives, the IRA tried to murder a unionist politician while he was visiting his sick son in hospital. This was the kind of cynical double-dealing which has earned Sinn Fein/IRA an unholy reputation — talking peace on the one hand, shooting on the other — and it can no longer be tolerated.

The Government also had its own evidence that while some Sinn Fein people appeared to be looking for peace, the IRA was behaving in the background like an organisation going to war. With such evidence, and then the attempted murder, the Government finally realised that it was taking part in nothing more than a charade. When the next meeting between Sinn Fein and Dublin officials take place it will be about bringing an end to IRA violence "once and for all and quickly".

The Government will be accused of an over-reaction, of breaking vital lines of communication. But those lines of communication have brought nothing since the ceasefire ended. If anything they have only worsened the situation by allowing Sinn Fein to claim that if only other governments did this or that then peace would come. The place for such condition-making is at a conference table, and a place at the conference table will not come for Sinn Fein until the IRA ends its violence, for good. The Government has done the right thing.

In any event we cannot expect much to happen on the Northern political front until the British election is out of the way. In the meantime, however, there has been a very positive reaction so far to the plan, put forward by Dr Maurice Hayes, for a Police Ombudsman.

Here is something which has caused deep bitterness down through the decades — the strongly held belief among nationalists that the RUC is a biased force. Now, if the British Government goes ahead with the required legislation, all complaints about the RUC would go to an independent ombudsman. This won't make the RUC popular overnight but it would provide an outlet for the frustration which has built up among the minority over their treatment by the RUC and which has made normal policing in the North so difficult.