

1974

SECURITY - REPORTS ON INCIDENT ON 22.1.74

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CONFIDENTIAL
NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Stormont

BELFAST

BT4 3SY

29 January 1974

R H A Blackburn Esq LLB
Clerk to the Assembly
Northern Ireland Assembly Department
STORMONT

Sir

In accordance with your instructions, I report the proceedings, which I believe occurred, during the meeting of the Assembly on Tuesday 22 January 1974.

2. In view of various threats to disrupt the Assembly, which had been made during the previous week, considerable Royal Ulster Constabulary reinforcements had been provided to deal with possible disturbance either in the Chamber, in the Visitors' Gallery or both at the same time.

3. After prior discussion with Superintendent Gray, I requested him to act in accordance with the following plan:-

- (a) Should fighting break out in the Chamber then Royal Ulster Constabulary would be requested by me to enter the Chamber and stop fighting, using the minimum force necessary. No Member was to be arrested unless he was seen to commit an act of grievous bodily harm. Royal Ulster Constabulary were not to enter the Chamber without a direct request from me, unless it was seen that I was physically being prevented from passing such a request.
- (b) In the event of a Member or Members being suspended by Mr Speaker:-
 - (i) I would approach the Member or Members concerned and direct them to comply with Mr Speaker's ruling and accompany me out of the Chamber. Should they refuse to do so I would make further efforts to persuade them to leave with me.
 - (ii) Should I still be unsuccessful, I would request that the Royal Ulster Constabulary enter the Chamber and remove the Member or Members concerned. Initially this would be attempted by the Superintendent plus two constables - the Superintendent trying to persuade the Member or Members to leave verbally.
 - (iii) Should this token force be insufficient, then, substantial reinforcements would be called into the Chamber to physically remove the Member or Members concerned out of the Chamber and out of the precincts through the West Door. This force was to be adequate to prevent possible interference from friends of the Members concerned.
- (c) In view of the fact that the Superintendent and I were likely to be committed to the Chamber. It was understood that should Mr Speaker suspend the sitting, Inspector Atkins was without further request from

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me, to have the visitors and press galleries cleared, special attention being given to the visitors' gallery.

- (d) If possible forceable removal of Members as in b(iii) above would be delayed until such time as the visitors' gallery was completely cleared.

4. Immediately after prayers, Major Hall Thompson raised a point of order concerning the misappropriation of seats reserved for Members of the Executive. Mr Speaker ordered Members occupying these seats to vacate them. Dr Paisley, who was one of the Members concerned rose on a point of order, which Mr Speaker refused to accept. At this, a number of Members rose to protest and uproar commenced. Among other disorders which I noticed at this time, I particularly remember:-

- (a) Mr Beattie snatching the mace from the table, passing it to another Member (I think Mr James Craig) who tossed it to another Member, when it was shortly afterward intercepted by one of the Doorkeepers who brought it to me. I gave directions that it was to be placed in safe custody, until such time as I decided it could safely be restored to the table.
- (b) Professor Lindsay jumping on the table and carrying on, what I can only describe as a "war dance" on the table, shouting the while to press and visitors' galleries.

5. In view of the noise and turmoil, I could not hear any instruction which Mr Speaker may have given at this time, but, seeing him leave the Chamber, I assumed that he had suspended the Assembly. I accordingly sought clarification from the Clerk Assistant, who informed me that the Assembly had been temporarily suspended and that certain Members had been named by Mr Speaker. I asked that I be given a list of the Members named and this was provided. I then approached Mr Baird, whose name was on the list and who was sitting nearest to me on the front bench and requested him to accompany me out of the Chamber in accordance with Mr Speaker's ruling. This he refused to do. I then asked him if he would walk out quietly with two constables but he told me that he would not do so but would have to be carried out. Mr Baird was calm and courteous throughout this conversation. I then approached Dr Paisley and put the same question to him. He said that he would have nothing to do with me and would have to be put out by the British Army. During this conversation, Mr Hutchinson approached and made as if to strike, although in fact he only pushed me and was extremely abusive. Abuse was also hurled at me from other Members, amongst whom I remember, Mr Beattie and Mr Poots, who amongst other remarks shouted. "If you don't get out quick you will get hurt." The manner in which this was said leaves no possible doubt, in my mind, that this was a threat and not a warning. I then sent word to Superintendent Gray to come into the Chamber as arranged.

6. I then discussed the situation with Superintendent Gray, who had by then entered the Chamber by the West Door, but was very correctly keeping in the background. I told him that, after the galleries had been cleared, I would make one further attempt to persuade Dr Paisley to leave with me and that should I have no success, I would request him to have the offending Members removed. At his request, I showed him the list of Members which the Clerk Assistant had passed to me. When I saw that the visitors gallery was clear, I approached Dr Paisley, pointed out to him that the gallery was clear and asked him to accompany me out of the Chamber in accordance with Mr Speaker's ruling - this Dr Paisley refused to do. I then asked Superintendent Gray to carry on as arranged using whatever force was necessary. At this stage, I remember noticing Superintendent Gray approaching Dr Paisley and trying to persuade him to leave the Chamber without fuss and the Doctor refusing to do so. I also remember seeing Superintendent Gray approaching other Members with similar result. I also remember seeing Dr Paisley and other Members seizing the Clerks Chairs and placing these as some sort of barricade.

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Eventually, when it was apparent that the Members concerned would not leave voluntarily, Superintendent Gray called in reinforcements, and the Members concerned were carried out of the Chamber. I remember at this stage noticing Dr Paisley, Mr Beattie and Professor Lindsay violently resisting the police. I was later informed, but did not myself observe, that Professor Lindsay had chained himself to one of the benches. I did however see the Professor hurl this chain, which was about 6 ft long and similar to that used for mooring a motor cruiser in the general direction of the Clerk Assistant and I. I understand, from Doorkeeper Axon, that the chain had initially been brought into the Chamber, by Mr Hutchinson, in a brown paper parcel.

8. As each Member was removed, I furnished the Clerk Assistant with their names, which he recorded.

9. Eventually all the Members concerned had been evicted but, as other of Dr Paisley's supporters had seated themselves on the front bench, it was apparent to me that it was unlikely that we could avoid further trouble. Accordingly, fearing for the safety of the mace, I, at this time, gave no directions for it to be restored to the table. Mr Speaker resumed the Chair and requested those Members sitting on the front bench to vacate them. When they refused to obey his ruling, Mr Speaker ordered the Sergeant-at-Arms to remove the Members concerned from the front bench, using whatever force was necessary. I asked the Clerk Assistant to furnish me with the names of the Members concerned and then approached those sitting on the bench nearest to the West Door and asked them to accompany me out of the Chamber in accordance with Mr Speaker's ruling. This they refused to do. I accordingly requested Superintendent Gray to have the Members concerned removed. This was done with little resistance and if, as I believe, Mr Dunlop was one of the Members concerned, he was courteous in his behaviour to me throughout. I then noticed that Mr Heslip and Mr Douglas, who had been sitting quietly on the front bench nearest the East Door were also on the Clerk Assistant's list. I accordingly approached these Members and requested them to leave in accordance with Mr Speaker's ruling. They were very courteous to me but explained that they had been sitting quietly in the seats they had occupied since the second meeting of the Assembly and they had not heard Mr Speaker's decision that they should leave the House. I told them that, if they would move back into the second bench I would represent the matter to Mr Speaker, so that, if he were satisfied a mistake had been made, he could amend his ruling. This they refused to do. I checked with the Clerk Assistant that there could be no doubt that these gentlemen had been named by Mr Speaker and, on being informed that this was the case, I again approached them and asked them to accompany me out of the Chamber. Mr Douglas left, but Mr Heslip told me that his conscience dictated that he be removed by the police. I gave the necessary instructions to the Superintendent and Mr Heslip was escorted out of the Chamber. By this time the front bench had again been occupied - I think by Dr Carson and Miss Coulter. Believing that the situation was now sufficiently in hand, I ordered that the mace be restored to the table.

10. Mr Speaker again took the Chair and requested the Members concerned to leave. On their refusing, I was again instructed to have them removed. Dr Carson and Miss Coulter were courteous to me but refused. They were accordingly carried out by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (In Miss Coulter's case by policewomen) but offered no resistance.

11. Mr Speaker once more took the Chair when it was seen that Mr Laird was on the front bench. After, the by now regrettably familiar pattern of events, Mr Laird was taken from the Chamber without resistance.

12. Once more Mr Speaker took the Chair and Mrs Paisley attempted to raise points of order from one of the back benches. When Mrs Paisley refused to accept his

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ing, Mr Speaker ordered her to be removed from the Chamber. After she had refused to accompany me out of the Chamber, she was eventually at my request, escorted out by Royal Ulster Constabulary women constables.

13. The Speaker resumed his Chair and business for the day continued without further interruption.

14. Throughout these regrettable incidents, I believe that Superintendent Gray and his subordinates acted completely in accord with my requests and wishes and I can only express my admiration at the manner in which they carried out a difficult and unpleasant task. In my opinion, the fact that no serious injury was received by any of the participants was due to the restraint and efficiency of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who at times were greatly provoked. I was present in the Chamber throughout and, at no time did I witness the Royal Ulster Constabulary use anything other than the minimum necessary force.


15. In conclusion, whereas I believe this to be a correct account, I cannot be sure on which particular occasion particular Members were evicted. This is particularly so as between the first and second suspensions, when things were most rowdy and hectic. However on each occasion I passed the names concerned to the Clerk Assistant, who recorded them on a list and I attach a copy of this list at Appendix.

16. Recommendations - In view of the regrettable possibility of further incidents of this nature occurring I believe lists of all Members should be available at the Table, and that when a Member is named by Mr Speaker his name on the list should be marked by an asterisk and the list passed to me. It might also be wise for one of the Clerks to remain in the Chamber and keep a diary of events.

I have the honour to be

Sir

Your obedient Servant



Sergeant-at-Arms

Appendix

Dr Paisley

Rev Beattie

Mr Baird

Professor Lindsay

Mr Harvey

Mr Poots

Mr McQuade

Mr Burns

Mr James Craig

Mr Dunlop

Mr Millar

Mr Hutchinson

Mr Smyth

Mr Heslip

Dr Carson

Miss Coulter

Mr Laird

Mrs Paisley