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HOME SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ON BRIGHTON BOMBING (HODDINOTT REPORT)

22 JANUARY 1985

CCO BOX  
A/Seathellis  
A-1 Section

With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the conclusions of the enquiry into security arrangements for last year's Conservative Party Conference.

Mr. J. Kirby  
D. Fisher

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On 22 October last year I made a statement about the explosion at Brighton. Police investigations into that crime are still continuing. The evidence so far obtained suggests that the explosion was caused by a device containing between 20 and 30 pounds of explosive placed behind a bath panel in Room 629 on the sixth floor of the Grand Hotel. It was almost certainly detonated by a long delay timer. The police have made exhaustive enquiries about staff and guests at the hotel. They have established that someone who stayed in Room 629 for three days about three weeks before the explosion had given a false address. Enquiries to trace him and other enquiries related to electronic devices recovered from the debris are continuing. The House will not expect me to go into further details about them.

In my statement last year I told the House that the Chief Constable of Sussex had asked Mr Hoddinott, the Deputy Chief Constable of Hampshire, to investigate the security arrangements in place at the time of the Conference. I have now received and studied a copy of his report. It cannot, for reasons of security, be published but I have placed in the Library of the House a summary,

Which Mr Hoddinott .....

which Mr Hoddinott has confirmed gives a fair and accurate account of his findings. Copies are also available in the Vote Office. I understand that the Sussex police authority are meeting to discuss the report with the Chief Constable tomorrow.

Mr Hoddinott has conducted a comprehensive and detailed enquiry into the plans and arrangements made for security at the Conference and the efficiency with which they were carried out. The House will see from the summary that he has judged the performance of the Sussex police against the information which was available to them and the level of precautions which were then regarded as usual and acceptable to those concerned.

His general conclusion against that background is that the Sussex police made proper and reasonable plans and implemented them competently and professionally.

He finds that they had access to all the relevant intelligence information up to the time of the explosion and took proper account of it.

He makes a number of detailed criticisms of the arrangements for communications within the Sussex force both of threat levels and the requirements for searches. He also criticises the adequacy of the co-operation between hotel management and the police.

Mr Hoddinott paid particular attention to search procedures. He did not criticise the police for failing to control and search

/each person ....

each person entering the hotel during the period of the Conference. He concluded that the hotel and those wishing to use it would not have accepted such an arrangement and that, given the assumption of free access to the hotel, the numbers involved would anyway have made it impracticable. He stresses that it has hitherto always been the practice of the police to take the basic nature of the occasion to be protected as the starting point for protection and security precautions, rather than to seek to change the nature of the occasion itself on security grounds.

Mr Hoddinott found that it would not have been the practice of any police force in Great Britain or Northern Ireland to have conducted a full search of the entire hotel prior to the Conference. The view would have been taken that, if it were to be fully effective, such a search would have taken some weeks, during which time the hotel would have had to be closed, with public access denied until the Conference was over. Mr Hoddinott's judgment is that on the basis of the procedures which then seemed reasonable and likely to be acceptable to those concerned, Sussex police are not to be criticised for the fact that the bomb hidden on the sixth floor was not discovered.

Mr Hoddinott was critical, however, of the inadequate search that was made of the first floor, which should under standard police procedures have been searched. The failure to do so adequately was caused by the absence of a clear allocation of responsibility within the Sussex police.

Different and stricter arrangements for searching were possible at the Conference Centre, where the building was to a much greater degree taken over for the exclusive use of the Conservative Party and was inherently easier to search.

Looking to the future, Mr Hoddinott has not attempted to prescribe new policing arrangements, but he has, as the House will see from the summary of his report, drawn attention to a number of important areas where changes now need to be considered on a national basis. He also makes clear, however, that a balance will always have to be struck between security and the conduct of political affairs in our open democratic society.

The House will recall that I announced in my statement last October that we had at that stage already set in hand new arrangements centrally both for assessing terrorist intentions and capabilities and co-ordinating the counter-measures required to meet them. These central arrangements are now fully in place and I believe they have already proved their value.

But many of the specific counter-measures are and will remain the responsibility of local police forces, with the Metropolitan Police Special Branch having particular national responsibilities. To assist them in their task I am now setting up a new permanent Working Group. Its role will be to bring about successful co-ordination between police forces throughout Great Britain and also to ensure that they have available to them all relevant techniques and experience. This Group, under Home Office

/chairmanship, will ...

chairmanship, will monitor the advice and techniques available for protecting targets and countering terrorist threats and will co-ordinate the promulgation of advice to police forces. It will include, in addition to the police, representatives of the Security Service and the Army. I have already arranged with my Rt Hon Friends the Secretaries of State for Defence, Northern Ireland and Scotland to involve the Army and the RUC, in training police officers from all mainland forces in search techniques and to ensure that full use is made of the relevant experience gained in Northern Ireland.

The Chief Constable of Sussex, after discussion with his police authority tomorrow, will take corrective action for the future on the specific criticisms of his own force contained in the report, and the new Working Group will ensure that the points of general relevance are made to all Chief Constables.

Since the explosion at Brighton the Metropolitan Police have reviewed and increased the measures they take to protect members of the Cabinet and others who may be at particular risk. Mr Hoddinott's report is bound also to lead us to consider afresh all the precautions that need to be taken for the major Party Conferences in 1985 and for similar major political events. Difficult decisions will have to be taken about many matters relating to security, including the extent and manner of public access, the accommodation of political leaders subject to particular threat, pass systems and arrangements for stewarding meetings. These questions raise important issues about the cost and acceptability of changes to established democratic traditions.

The answers will not be the same in the case of each event, but I am sure that representatives of the political parties should participate in the process of resolving these issues. I have therefore asked Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Lawrence Byford, to head a team of Chief Constables and others to prepare urgently proposals for security at this year's Party Conferences and comparable occasions and I am writing today to invite Party representatives to be involved actively in the work of this group.

I am most grateful to Mr Hoddinott for the very thorough and professional way in which he carried out his task. He has given his assessment of what happened at Brighton, of the problems that now need to be tackled and the further questions that must be answered. As I said last October total security is impossible in a free, democratic society. But in the light of Brighton we must enhance previously acceptable levels of security and equip ourselves to take in a clear-sighted way the difficult decisions involved in making any changes in the balance between security and the conduct of politics in a free society. I believe that the decisions that I have now taken will help significantly to enhance security and provide a firm framework for giving acceptable and practical answers to the outstanding questions.

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SUMMARY OF THE CONCLUSIONS OF MR J HODDINOTT'S REPORT

During the morning of 12 October 1984, after the bomb explosion at the Grand Hotel, Brighton, the Chief Constable of Sussex invited Mr John Hoddinott, Deputy Chief Constable of Hampshire, to conduct an investigation into police arrangements for security at the Conservative Party Conference. Mr Hoddinott carried out his report independently of the Sussex Police, with a team of police officers selected by him from his own force. He and his team made a wide range of enquiries of people having information relevant to his investigation, both generally in relation to the techniques to be applied in protecting such an occasion; and specifically in relation to the precautions taken for the Conference. The information obtained was not confined to formal admissible evidence, but covered opinions, hypothetical questions, and hearsay material.

2. Major parts of Mr Hoddinott's report are unsuitable for publication on security grounds, because some of the precautions to be taken on such occasions could be more easily circumvented if publicised. Mr Hoddinott indicated in his report those parts of his findings which could be made public without risk to security. Mr Hoddinott has confirmed to the Home Secretary that this summary does not represent a threat to security. He has also confirmed that, although as a summary it inevitably omits much detail, it is a fair and accurate account of his report.

3. The enquiry concentrated on the precautions and security arrangements applied up to the time when the bomb exploded, and did not attempt to cover any matters connected with the investigation of the crime, or to prescribe arrangements for the future. It reviewed the measures planned by the Sussex police on this occasion, and the efficiency with which they were implemented. The performance of the Sussex police was judged against the experience and information which they or any other

/force faced



force faced with a comparable task should have had, or should have obtained. Mr Hoddinott reviewed the entire security operation including aspects beyond those directly relevant to the explosion.

#### Planning and preparation

4. Police plans for the conference were initially prepared early in 1984, and from April onwards were the subject of meetings and discussion with representatives of the Conservative Party, and of the management of the conference centre and the Grand Hotel. Although the available information had to be re-assessed nearer the time, it was clear from the start that precautions needed to be provided against any terrorist attacks or unruly political demonstrations; but that security measures should be provided in a way which did not obstruct unreasonably the relaxed atmosphere, and the opportunity for delegates and party personnel to meet each other freely, which is part of the purpose of such a conference. That is consistent with the long-standing practice of the police that protection and security precautions must be in keeping with the nature of the occasion to be protected, and not vice versa. The report emphasises that this is a major constraint upon the precautions to be taken by the police.

5. Mr Hoddinott's investigation found that the arrangements made by the police, and the extensive consultations within the Sussex police, with the Metropolitan Police Special Branch and with the Conservative Party conference organisers, the conference centre and the hotel management, all provided a proper framework for a professional approach to security. He noted the contribution to the security arrangements made by all those involved. The overall responsibility rested with the police; at the conference centre the police role was supported by arrangements made by the Conservative Party to vet and search those attending the conference. Those arrangements did not, and could not, apply

/at the hotel,

at the hotel, which was the centre for a range of social functions, and which had not, to the same degree as the conference centre, been taken over for exclusive use by the Conservative Party for functions under the direct control of the conference organisers.

Effectiveness of planning, including the response to available information

6. The planning framework described above, which Mr Hoddinott found to be satisfactory, was implemented by the police and the other agencies concerned by means of instructions, of varying degrees of formality, to those concerned. The police instructions were in the form of a detailed, written operational order. Mr Hoddinott assessed the potential effectiveness of the police plan and the detailed arrangements made within the agreed framework by others, to the extent that their roles were directly relevant to the efficiency of the police operation. He also assessed the police response to the additional information made available to them up to the moment of the explosion in adapting their plans where necessary to ensure their efficiency.

7. Mr Hoddinott found, without reservation, that all available relevant information bearing upon the threat of a terrorist or other form of attack was properly passed on to the Sussex Police. He had access to all such information and confirmed that there was no information (including that which was the basis of a classified circular from the Metropolitan Police to all forces on 10 October) suggesting a specific threat to the conference; and that the information available to the police was adequately considered in relation to their plans. He finds in relation to the circular of 10 October that the Sussex Police were right to conclude that they were already aiming to provide precautions on a scale at least appropriate to the threat.

8. Mr Hoddinott noted, however, some possible improvements in the procedure for communicating and defining the level of threat

/in a major

in a major operation in which many different components of a single force were involved, and in which they were also working with members of another force, namely Metropolitan Police protection officers. He found that, although in practice there was no material misunderstanding of the level of threat, the clarity with which it was explained to those involved would have been improved if police forces generally adopted a system of standard definitions of threat levels, denoted by numbers.

9. Although the police plan, and consequently Mr Hoddinott's report, was concerned with several different sorts of possible attack, at several possible places, the remainder of this summary concentrates on the precautions at and around the Grand Hotel, which are relevant to the attack which in fact occurred. Except where necessary to compare with arrangements elsewhere, this summary does not discuss precautions taken at the conference centre, of which Mr Hoddinott made no criticisms.

#### Limitations on police powers

10. In addition to the considerations at paragraph 5 above, Mr Hoddinott drew attention to limitations on the scope of the police operation which were outside the operational control of the police.

i. The police do not have a general power to prohibit use of the public highway. They took some measures which relied on the co-operation of the public: but only to a limited extent could they keep members of the public, and vehicles, away from the immediate vicinity of the hotel.

ii. The police do not have the power to insist upon searching a private building such as the hotel. Mr Hoddinott found that, in considering the extent of searching to be undertaken - at least on the basis of

/the practice

the practice prevailing before 12 October - the police were right to conclude that a detailed and protracted search of the entire building and the subsequent restriction of access which would have been necessary to maintain its security would have been neither feasible nor acceptable to those concerned. For these reasons, Mr Hoddinott found that it was at that time reasonable for the Sussex police not to have contemplated a "search and seal" operation. No other force in Great Britain or Northern Ireland would have done so in the circumstances at the time. Mr Hoddinott examined practice in Northern Ireland. The RUC are not faced with directly comparable functions and use different procedures. But Mr Hoddinott drew attention to lessons from their practice which could perhaps be applied in Great Britain (but which will not be described for security reasons).

iii. The police do not, without specific reason, have the power to prohibit access to a building such as the Grand Hotel. The hotel management would have had the power to do so, but Mr Hoddinott found that it would have been inconsistent with the practice of free access between party members and conference delegates which had grown up at previous conferences; and it would have been unwelcome to the hotel. Police precautions at the hotel therefore never contemplated an absolute control on access, and large numbers of people, including many unconnected with the conference, were free to attend the hotel in the evenings, when it had a licensing extension until 2.00 p.m. Nor did the precautions contemplate an exhaustive check on the identity of those entering: Mr Hoddinott found that that would not, in any event, have made a material

contribution to security. Superficially plausible evidence of identity is easily forged, and the police had no power to refuse entry. Against the background of the free access to the hotel which was tacitly assumed by the police, the conference organisers and the hotel management, a process of checking identity would have been impractical in view of the numbers attending. On the assumption, which Mr Hoddinott found to be correct that the hotel and its visitors would not have accepted arrangements to stop and search all those entering the hotel, and that such arrangements would have been impractical in view of the numbers involved, he did not criticise the police for not attempting to control, identify or search those entering the hotel.

11. In summary, Mr Hoddinott found that the public rooms on the ground floor of the hotel remained available to the general public throughout the conference (though access to the public entrance to the hotel was less freely available during the daytime because of the barriers in the road outside, which were primarily intended to keep any demonstrators away from the hotel, which in practice limited public access to some extent). He made no criticism of that, noting that all concerned believed any controls to be both impractical and inconsistent with the organisers' and the hotel's wishes. He noted that generally effective arrangements were made by the police, the detail of which will not be described on security grounds to control access to the first floor landing and the suites leading off it, where the principle guests, including those with protection officers, were accommodated. He noted that reasonable precautions, of deterrent as well as direct value, were taken to watch the public areas of the hotel, although the value of this precaution was inevitably severely limited by the large numbers present.

#### Search procedures

12. In analysing the limitations, actual or assumed, on the

/precautions which

precautions which the Sussex police were able to take by way of search and control of access, Mr Hoddinott found no instance in which members of the Sussex police had failed to carry out conscientiously the operational orders issued to them. He emphasises that on the basis of the experience then available, any other police force might well have approached the problem in a broadly similar way. In particular, and directly relevant to the attack which in fact occurred, the police assumed (correctly, as Mr Hoddinott established) that they would not have access to the building for a prolonged "search and seal" operation, and would not be able to control access to the whole building during the conference. He found it understandable that in consequence, the police operational order did not contain instructions for a search of the entire hotel before the conference started, and that no such search was carried out. He points out that, with techniques then in use, it is by no means certain that the best practicable search would have found a bomb concealed on the 6th floor in advance of the conference.

13. Mr Hoddinott is, however, critical of the arrangements in respect of the first floor, which contained the rooms allocated to the Prime Minister and the other senior Ministers. It was assumed by the officers concerned with planning the precautions, including the issue of the operational order, that a search of these rooms would be carried out. A search of rooms to be used by persons receiving police protection is recommended as a standard procedure in documents available to police forces. But the operational order did not specify a search, and there was no clear allocation of responsibility for carrying it out. A search of the Prime Minister's suite before her arrival was undertaken by police officers, assisted by a dog trained to detect explosives; they acted on the initiative of their immediate superior. One of the other two suites was searched by the protection officer on duty with the person concerned. The third suite was not searched. Even though this omission did not affect what subsequently happened, Mr Hoddinott criticised the failure to ensure proper search procedures for the first floor suites.

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14. Despite the practical limitations on the nature of the physical security precautions which could be applied in the circumstances which prevailed at the hotel during the conference, Mr Hoddinott found that effective co-operation between police and hotel management could make a material contribution to security.

15. He was disappointed at the level of co-operation between those concerned and at the response of the hotel management, given that the hotel, unlike the conference centre, was to remain available to the public during the conference. The familiarity of the hotel staff with the building could have been a security asset if they were properly briefed. He believed they should have been briefed by the hotel management, in co-operation with the police, but that was not done adequately. The staff identification system, the security of room keys and accommodation lists were primarily the responsibility of the hotel management, and he found weaknesses in those aspects which effective co-operation between police and the hotel might have remedied.

#### Conclusions

16. Although this summary excludes a number of details on security grounds, every significant criticism recorded in Mr Hoddinott's report is reflected in it. Mr Hoddinott emphasised in his report the wider context in which his criticisms should be set. He found that for the most part the measures which the Sussex police planned to take were proper and reasonable in the circumstances, and were effectively implemented. The police had the task of protecting a large gathering against a wide variety of possible forms of attack and, regardless of the efficiency with which precautions are conceived and implemented, there can be no absolute certainty that such precautions will suffice. Sussex police had to deal with 24 separate premises requiring a degree of protection, and 12 persons subject to a high degree of risk for widely differing reasons. 93 major events involving over 5,000 people took place within 4 days. Over 100 officers (from

/Sussex and the

Sussex and the Metropolitan Police) were assigned to personal protection duties. 1,000 police officers were involved in the operation, at a cost to the police authority of more than £500,000 before the explosion occurred.

17. The police operation in Brighton, Mr Hoddinott found, was handled in very much the same way as any other force would have done on the basis of long-established practice governing the balance to be struck between the need for security precautions and the unrestricted conduct of party and public business in a democracy. That was the context in which Sussex Police formulated their plans for their role in security precautions at the conference, and Mr Hoddinott found that the inevitable balance between the requirements of security and the freedom of protected individuals was properly and professionally assessed. Events in Brighton, and Mr Hoddinott's report, raise major questions about the operational and in some cases the legal extent of measures to protect such an occasion. What those being protected will want or accept, and what the police regard as necessary, may well have been affected by events in Brighton. But Mr Hoddinott emphasises that that is not a basis for criticising decisions taken by Sussex police before those events. He found points to criticise, but after a searching scrutiny of the whole police operation he recorded an overall impression which reflected great credit upon the Sussex police, with numerous examples of high professional standards, and of the effective application of the training, experience and individual qualities of Sussex Police officers.

#### Issues for the future

18. Although his report was not intended to prescribe measures for the future, Mr Hoddinott drew attention to several areas where improvements may be made, perhaps involving distinct changes in the arrangements at future conferences. These issues will be covered in the further work which will be carried out at the Home Secretary's request by the Home Office and the police service,

/in consultation



in consultation with others including other Government Departments and the political parties. The aspects to be covered include the following:

- a) Search procedures
- b) Communication of threat levels and assessments
- c) Availability to the police of specialist technical support in countering certain types of threat
- d) Co-operation between the police and any private body whose role has a bearing on security, covering such aspects as access and pass systems
- e) Legal constraints on police precautions
- f) Continuing critical assessment of best practice in police security precautions, to ensure that experience is shared
- g) Specifically in consultation with the political parties, advice on those aspects of security - including accommodation arrangements - which are within the control of the Parties.