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### **GROSVENOR SQUARE (DEMONSTRATIONS)**

*HC Deb 04 April 1968 vol 762 cc731-54* [731](#)

§ Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Gourlay.]

§ 9.22 p.m.

§ [Mr. Peter M. Jackson](#) (The High Peak)

I begin by thanking you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity of drawing attention to this matter. I have a unique qualification to raise it, in that I believe that I was the only Member present on the occasion. I will not only discuss the events of this rather unhappy Sunday, but also inform my hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State of the negotiations beforehand between the Metropolitan Police and the officers of the Vietnam Ad Hoc Committee, which organised—or, perhaps, failed to organise—this demonstration.

My hon. and learned Friend is probably aware that the officers of this organisation made representations to the Metropolitan Police on 5th March, they agreed a route and, on the suggestion of the police, a procedure. I understand that the route agreed at that meeting was from Trafalgar Square up Charing Cross Road, along Oxford Street, up Holles Street into Wigmore Street, down Orchard Street, through North Audley Street and into Grosvenor Square, not in front of the American Embassy, but around the three sides of the Square, and that they would exit from the Square up Upper Grosvenor Street.

I understand—I have met those concerned—that the police suggested—I think that this was a wholly admirable suggestion—that letters of protest should be handed in and a request was made by the organisers for a list of the participating organisations. This list was given by the organisers, 40 in number, and it was agreed that up to five people would leave the main body of the demonstration at the corner of North Audley Street, would hand in their protest letter to the American Embassy and then rejoin their groups at the corner of South Audley Street. This was excellent and would have given a focus to the demonstration; people would have felt that they had an opportunity to let off steam and make their point.

[732](#) As we know, this procedure was not carried out, and I believe that the police have some responsibility in the matter. The line of route was changed at the last minute and, while I do not think that the organisers in any way quarrel with this, it must be remembered that instead of going up Holies Street and Wigmore Street and down Orchard Street, it proceeded along Oxford Street and then turned left into North Audley Street. At the junction of North Audley Street and the Square a great deal of congestion occurred as a result of the police barrier. I believe that this was, to a large extent, responsible for what happened afterwards.

I have with me a photograph which was obviously taken from the roof of one of the nearby buildings. This picture appeared on page 6 of the Illustrated London News of 23rd March. I draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend because he will see from it the precise location of the police

cordon and the fact that a bottleneck was created at the corner of North Audley Street and the square.

Give or take five feet, I estimate that no more than 25 to 30 feet were allowed for the demonstrators to get through and march around the Square. That was the great mistake. I should, perhaps, mention that the organisers bear some responsibility in that they did not announce at the meeting in Trafalgar Square the route that should have been taken. It would have been advisable for them to have had stewards on the route announcing over megaphones the route that was to be taken.

A bottleneck was created and it was impossible for the sea of people stretching along both sides of the street to get through the 25 to 30 feet allowed to them. I was pushed through, as were the vast majority of demonstrators, and I suppose that they felt—I say this because I was not aware of precisely what was happening and I am sure that the same can be said of the vast majority of people there—that they were being denied access to the Square.

It had been agreed earlier that the leaders of the various participating groups would hand in letters of protest. The leading group was headed by Miss Vanessa Redgrave. She appeared at the head of the march and made a request [733](#) to hand in her letter of protest. I understand that her request was refused by a chief inspector. The vast majority of demonstrators were obviously not aware of this, but I am sure that those who were in the vicinity would regard that occurrence as something of a provocation.

The demonstrators were eventually pushed through the bottleneck and were given no direction as to the route the demonstration would take. Perhaps, not unexpectedly, they thought that they would disperse into the Square. Had the police been more intelligent on this occasion in handling the demonstration, they could have anticipated this reaction. Although I was not present, I understand that this happened to a demonstration which took place on 22nd October.

As I am criticising the police, it is incumbent on me to suggest how this situation could have been handled. Naturally the American Embassy must be Protected, but I suggest that the use of foot policemen, and certainly the use of mounted policemen, was not the most effective way of handling it. One way in which it could have been handled would have been for barbed wire barriers to have been placed in front of the Embassy. I have in mind the sort of barriers on light wooden frames that were used during the war. The second way would have been the use of buses. I understand that the police use buses to blockade the entrance to Downing Street. People do not climb over barbed wire and they have no means of scaling buses. This would have been very much less of a provocation and a much more efficient way of protecting the Embassy.

The demonstrators dispersed into the Square and there an attempt was made to disperse the crowd by mounted police. When this matter first came to the Floor of the House, I said that I regarded it as a provocation. I am not alone in saying this, for it is the view of the National Council for Civil Liberties and a considerable number of my correspondents. I will quote from letters I have received which vividly illustrate the reaction of many participants. One letter said: I witnessed, and I am prepared to testify in court, a mounted policeman who rode his horse out in front of the rest of the police and then charged at full gallop across the Square towards the Embassy some 30 or 40 feet in front of him at a girl 20-years-old who [734](#) was not doing anything. There was no one near her. This policeman galloped straight at her. Luckily it was a glancing blow. I am convinced that had he hit her she would now be dead. I was the first to reach her. I think she was unconscious for about a minute. She lay as one dead. I think well over 100 people saw this incident. No one can suggest that those 100 people

would react to that display of violence with indifference. I suggest that it was a clear provocation and the demonstrators responded as one could perhaps expect. Flowers and other missiles were thrown. This kind of violence helps to create an atmosphere conducive to violence. Obviously crowds of demonstrators have to be controlled, but I think it quite wrong for mounted police to be used for this purpose.

Attempts were made by the police to clear the Square, and these, of course, were effective, but one of the consequences was that people were arrested in a very arbitrary manner. I draw the attention of my hon. and learned Friend to two such cases. Doubtless he has had drawn to his attention the letter in *The Guardian* by Mr. E. Appleby, Justice of the Peace for Blaydon. That said: It has been proved to me beyond all reasonable doubt that it is possible for a person of exemplary character to be convicted of assault in London. As a former magistrate I feel this is a grave situation. One case will illustrate. An inoffensive student of exemplary character and integrity, standing some distance from the police, taking photographs, was set upon by four policemen shouting 'Let's get this one!' He was dragged into a van and told not to use his camera or he 'would not see it again'. Next day he was charged by his assailants with assault and summarily convicted. No opportunity had been given him to use a 'phone or to contact his parents. And no time before or after his arrest had he done anything which could be remotely construed as an assault! I also draw the attention of the Under-Secretary to a report which appeared in *The Times* on 25th March recording the dismissal of one case by the magistrates at Marlborough Street. Referring to a letter written by a defendant, it said: In his letter he says that a number of policemen kicked him and after his arrest he was dragged behind a police coach and cuffed about the head. What made me considerably more anxious, he says, was that a policeman afterwards told him he did not think the accused man was guilty, but he, the policeman, could lay himself open to a charge of wrongful arrest if he did not produce some 'half-truths'. <sup>735</sup> The man alleges that he told the policeman he intended to plead Not Guilty. 'Soon after he approached me waving his statement at me and said: "This is much stronger now",' he says in his letter, 'He told me while we were waiting that on many occasions he found it necessary to invent half-truths when giving evidence, since he knew the defendants were guilty, but without these embellishments they would be acquitted. He also suggested that this was common practice in the police force'. He adds that although the violence was unpleasant he was considerably more anxious about the behaviour of the policeman since this was of universal importance. The man gives the number of the policeman he says was involved. The man appeared at Marlborough Street on Friday. Mr. St. John Harmsworth, the magistrate, dismissing the charge, said that after hearing the defendant from the witness box he was quite sure he was not the sort of man who would come to court and deliberately lie to save his own skin. There are various other complaints of this nature. I shall not weary my hon. and learned Friend by drawing his attention to a dossier on the incidents compiled by the National Council of Civil Liberties, which I or the Council will send to him.

Commander Lawler strongly refuted any charges of police brutality. I shall cite evidence of such brutality, and in particular I draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to the systematic attempts the police made to destroy any photographic evidence. I shall quote from two letters I have received from participants. The first is from an accredited observer of the National Council for Civil Liberties. He says: The demonstration was being dispersed and moving northwards along Duke Street in a ragged but not disorderly way. I was walking on the right-hand pavement with a few friends and I noticed as we came past the police bus that the police were getting very rough with demonstrators up in the corners of the goods entrance. I stopped momentarily and then observed a superintendent charging across the street towards what I then saw to be a film cameraman who was filming the incidents across the road. Several other policemen were standing around in Barrett Street or Picton Place apparently unconcerned at the cameraman's activity. When the superintendent reached the

cameraman—with the clear aim of destroying camera and film (and film-maker too if necessary)—about a dozen other people, half police, half civilians, converged on the pair, the former concerned to aid the superintendent and the latter to rescue the camera and cameraman. For my own part, I took only two steps forward when I was surrounded by five police [736](#) men, received a knee in the groin, was thrown to the ground and kicked by five or six boots. After a time I was hauled up and according to accounts of witnesses afterwards two attempts were made to arrest me but I was not in a state to respond and in the end was dropped. I should now like to quote from a letter by a participant who obviously, due to his situation, could not have committed any violence or provocation against the police. He writes: I joined the march to the U.S. Embassy more out of interest than a fervent belief in the anti-American cause (although I do have strong anti-Vietnam war feelings). I went along at this, my first big demonstration, taking photographs. By the time I reached Grosvenor Square I found I had run out of film and had to buy one from someone for 10s. Then, in order to keep out of trouble in what looked like a potentially dangerous situation, I settled myself in a tree and began taking pictures of the scenes. I was mildly shocked and surprised at some of the actions of our police; such as kicking demonstrators as they lay curled up, defenceless, on the ground ...; charging the crowd with horses. As the line of police pushing the crowd back advanced and drew level with my tree, I became suddenly aware of a policeman hacking away at my leg with a long, pointed stick and shouting at me to come down. I took a photograph of this action, at the same time telling the man what I thought of him. I then began to climb down from the tree and what followed shocked me more than anything else has shocked me in my life and caused me to lose completely my previous confidence in the police. A group of at least a dozen policemen stood waiting on the ground. I thought, 'How nice. They are going to catch me as I jump.' Not a bit. I was still six feet from the ground when my foot was grabbed and I was pulled to the ground and kicked and punched and trampled on. I heard one brute say: Get his camera. 'I stumbled to my feet in time to see my valuable film being ripped from the camera and, of course, ruined. Another appeared to think I had another camera in my pocket (it was actually an empty case). So I was again thrown to the ground and the case taken from me. Again, I do not think I need quote any more of that letter. There were so many attempts to destroy photographic evidence. Some of this evidence, however, escaped destruction and I hope in due course to show my hon. and learned Friend some of the stills taken by one of the moving film units and certain other pictures.

Commander Lawler also says that there were no examples of police acting with brutality. Again, I am afraid the evidence does not support him. It would be appropriate at this juncture to draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to the Associated Press picture which appeared in some of the newspapers. He [737](#) will see Constable C.170 restraining one of his colleagues, who has a truncheon in his hand and is about to beat a girl. Most of the newspapers cut this picture. They did not show the action of Constable C.170, who was attempting to restrain the violent action of his colleague.

I want to quote from another N.C.C.L. observer on the question of violence. He says: Shortly afterwards, while the mounted police were still trying to clear the gardens but there were still large crowds of marchers in the north east quarter, I saw one major incident of police violence I am able to report. A constable used a heavy truncheon to strike repeatedly two girls and one man... He gives people names, and goes on: As the girls were cowered on the ground and tried to protect themselves from the blows, there seemed to be no justification for this violence whatever. Both girls were streaming with blood when they got away, having cuts on the head. He did not see whether the man was injured. He adds that other police were around and tried to prevent other demonstrators approaching.

There is no doubt the police, when arresting people, acted with violence. I have another letter, to which I shall not draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention, from a correspondent who reports the violence to which he was subjected when he was placed in a bus.

[§ Mr. Cranley Onslow \(Woking\)](#)

The hon. Gentleman has made several references to what he calls "accredited observers" of the N.C.C.L. Will he assist us? How many such accredited observers of the N.C.C.L. were sent to this demonstration? I assume that they must have been sent by the N.C.C.L. What were they told to look for?

[§ Mr. Jackson](#)

I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the instructions which the N.C.C.L. gave to its 25 accredited observers. The letter to them said: You will appreciate that we are not concerned with the objectives of the demonstration and that we shall in no sense be acting on behalf of the organisers or participants. Our job is to ensure that the right of peaceful protest is not interfered with. If incidents do occur instigated either by the marchers or by the police they should be noted. The purpose of the observers was merely to observe and in no way to participate.

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[§ Mr. Onslow rose—](#)

[§ Mr. Speaker](#)

Order. Interventions prolong speeches. There is, I hope, an opportunity for debate tonight.

[§ Mr. Onslow](#)

I am most reluctant to prolong speeches, Mr. Speaker. But may I ask the hon. Gentleman how many incidents of brutality not involving the police were reported?

[§ Mr. Jackson](#)

I have gone through this report very quickly. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the number but I can tell him that such incidents are reported by the observers.

[§ Mr. Onslow](#)

Why not give them?

[§ Mr. Jackson](#)

I should make my position clear. I am not suggesting, nor are the N.C.C.L. or the majority of participants, that the majority of the police acted in this way. The majority of them acted with commendable restraint and I make that clear. But the House must accept that very few people are prepared to speak out for those who were involved in the demonstration. The participants have had an unfair Press. The Press has not, with exceptions, by and large drawn the public's attention to the incidents I am relating.

Another matter I would like to draw to my hon. Friend's attention is the action of the police in searching the buses containing persons wishing to participate in the demonstration. I am sure hon. Members will know that certain buses were stopped en route to London, taken to London police stations and searched. Certain so-called "offensive weapons" were found and a young man was

today fined £15 for having a small packet of pepper in his possession, though I would hardly have thought that pepper was an offensive weapon. Also, paint was found; and ball-bearings which presumably were to be thrown under horses' hooves were also found.

All these buses were taken to various police stations throughout London but only in the case of the Cambridge bus were any charges preferred against those involved. I have had a report from the contingent from Sheffield and, as I know some of the persons involved very well, I would like to have my hon. Friend's comment on it. The Sheffield bus was stopped on a motorway. The driver had been told in the middle of the week that [739](#) he was to be stopped. Of course, he did not inform the demonstrators of that. He was told that he would be taken to Hendon police station. The right of the police to stop the bus was, of course, challenged by those on the bus and they were advised by Superintendent Hunt of West Hendon Police Station that he had power to act under the [Metropolitan Police Act, 1839](#).

When I received this letter I took the trouble to look up the [Metropolitan Police Act](#) of 1839 and I would like to quote the relevant passage of Clause 66 to my hon. Friend. I feel that the police contravened the powers which they have. The relevant passage, I believe, is this: and every such constable may also stop, search and detain any vessel, boat, cart or carriage in or upon which there shall be reason to suspect that any thing stolen or unlawfully obtained may be found, and also any person who may be reasonably suspected of having or conveying in any manner any thing stolen or unlawfully obtained; and any person to whom any property shall be offered to be sold, pawned or delivered, if he shall have reasonable cause to suspect that any such offence has been committed with respect to such property, or that the same or any part thereof has been stolen or otherwise unlawfully obtained... I am no lawyer, but I have had advice on this and I understand that the powers which the police have in respect of the 1839 Act are to search vehicles, vessels or carriages in respect of property which they suspect may have been stolen. There is no question of there having been anything that had been stolen on these buses, and if one looks at the event it is apparent that the police knew this.

The police were obviously privy to the intentions of the organisers. The bus company was contacted in the middle of the week in Sheffield and was told that the bus would be stopped and taken to Hendon police station. Nothing was found on the bus, except a tin of paint with a small brush, which it was intended should be used for painting the blank banners brought by the demonstrators. These people were detained in the police station. The police insisted on having their names and addresses, and physical descriptions.

I would like to ask my hon. and learned Friend whether the police have the power to do this. I would also like to know what happened to this information. These are peaceful demon [740](#) strators, no charges were levelled against them and nothing was found in this bus. Is this information passed on to the local police? I suspect that it probably is.

I have deliberately given what is possibly a one sided view of what happened on 17th March. It is only right and proper, because we have had a one-sided view, certainly from the other side of the House, and no one has attempted to put the other side. I would like to make my own position clear. I do not in any way condone the violence, whether it took place at the behest of the demonstrators or the police. It is very regret table. Nevertheless, this violence was provoked, and it was likely to happen when force was offered. It was unintelligent of the police to use mounted police with drawn truncheons. If people are to be restrained, and I am not suggesting that they should not be, the restraint should be offered by police on foot.

§ Mr. Speaker

Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not think me discourteous, but I would remind him that he has been speaking for 30 minutes. It is a very brief debate, and others have to speak.

§ Mr. Jackson

The charges which I have levelled against the police are levelled against a minority. I was present and I felt that the vast majority of the police acted in an exemplary way. Having said this, we should not attempt to whitewash what a minority of policemen did. We should not close our minds to alternative means of crowd control. Obviously the American Embassy has to be protected, as do others. It should be protected not by mounted policemen, not necessarily by policemen on foot, although they obviously should be involved. Physical barriers should be put up, of the type I have suggested, namely buses or barbed wire. I have a great number of letters complaining about the conduct. The National Council for Civil Liberties has prepared a dossier and I very much hope that my hon. and learned Friend will receive a deputation from the Council, when he can perhaps go into this matter in greater detail than is possible tonight.

§ 9.55 p.m.

§ Mr. R. W. Elliott (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North)

We are elected to this [741](#) House to defend freedom, the freedom which we know and cherish. It is a freedom of speech, a freedom—a right—to make public or private complaints if necessary. Those of us who switched on our television sets on the night of 17th March had not believed that we should see freedom taken advantage of so much and so badly used as it was by the hooligans who ran riot in Grosvenor Square 01 that Sunday—that most un-British of days.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Peter M. Jackson) has taken a long time in this debate to attack the police in their attitude towards those who demonstrated on that day. I think it would be the wish of the vast majority of the people in this country for someone—and it is me at this moment—to stand here now and say to the police who officiated during these disgraceful scenes in Grosvenor Square that we believe they were provoked almost beyond human endurance; that their behaviour that day was wholly honourable and unbelievably controlled; that we admire them in the way in which they controlled that unseemly, disgusting and disgraceful mob, and that we commend them for the work which they did on that day.

The hon. Member for High Peak said something with which I agree, and it was only one small thing. He said that the organisers of the demonstration bear some responsibility for what happened. No one is going to disagree with him on that. They certainly did. The misguided actress and others who led that procession could quite easily have made their objection in a peaceful way. It would seem from what we have been told this evening that the misguided actress, Miss Redgrave, caused, or those around her caused, trouble when the letter which she wished to hand into the American Embassy was refused. Did she have to carry an envelope? Did she have to make objection with a seething mob behind her, deliberately engendered? Of course she did not. I make no comment at this moment on the rights or wrongs of her cause, but she could have made objections in a hundred other ways.

Those who demonstrated not only had some responsibility, they had all the responsibility for the disgraceful happenings of that day. Hon. Members on both sides of the House, representing the [742](#) vast majority of the people of this country, would wish to condemn these holligans who

demonstrated in this disgraceful way and would wish also to commend the police for their behaviour on that day.

§ 9.58 p.m.

§ Mr. James Wellbeloved (Erith and Crayford)

One thing is quite clear. The Members of this House support absolutely the right of British citizens to demonstrate in the streets of this country without interference from the police, provided they are demonstrating in a peaceful manner. The events to which the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Peter M. Jackson) has referred do not conform to that definition. This was a demonstration which was carried too far. It was a demonstration, if one can believe the reports that have come into our possession, that one has read in the newspapers and received from other sources, designed to provoke violence by some of the participants, although not all of them. I believe among that vast demonstration the majority of people were setting out to demonstrate peacefully, but there was, within that vast concord of people, a small minority out to provoke that demonstration into the paths of violence. It is incumbent upon us all in the House to condemn that small minority who put in jeopardy the future of free demonstrations in this country.

I am not a stranger to demonstrations in Trafalgar Square. I can remember demonstrating against my own party in 1948 and 1949 when the then Home Secretary banned a May Day demonstration. I will not go too far into the past, because I am sure Mr. Speaker will bring me back to the present.

There have been in the past demonstrations in which many of us have participated, and we have always found it is due to the efforts of the Metropolitan Police, in particular those who serve in the mounted section, that those demonstrations proceed in a relatively peaceful manner. It is necessary, when there are thousands of people demonstrating and when there is an organised attempt by a minority to provoke violence, that the mounted police are able to move very rapidly, are able to move into the violent sections of the crowd and remove from demonstrators broken poles from banners that have been destroyed and which are 743 used—as I have seen them used—to assault policemen.

§ Mr. Peter M. Jackson

Is my right hon. Friend suggesting that the mounted police attacked only that section of the crowd? If so, I can contradict him.

§ It being Ten o'clock, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

§ Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Ernest G. Perry.]

§ Mr. Wellbeloved

My hon. Friend is a man of great intelligence, and, no doubt, in view of the rumours going about of Cabinet changes, he thinks that coming events cast their shadows before them. He referred to me as his "right hon. Friend". I hope that he is right after the weekend. However, I think that both he and I will be sadly disappointed.

I can speak only from my experience. I have complete confidence in the mounted section of the police. In large demonstrations like this, there must be occasions when there is provocation on both sides. There is no doubt provocation by some members of the police force who reach the point of exasperation. They have been abused and they have had things thrown at them, and in a moment of temper they do an unwise act. We all condemn unwise acts by a disciplined body—they should not

happen—but we must recognise that everyone is human. Certainly policemen are human. There were among the demonstrators reasonable people who were provoked.

I wish it to go out from this House, and particularly from this side of it, that we have complete and absolute confidence in the Metropolitan Police, who we consider have done a first-class job. We know that they will continue to afford to citizens the opportunity of peacefully demonstrating for political rights.

§ 10.2 p.m.

§ Mr. T. L. Iremonger (Ilford, North)

I associate myself most warmly with what has been said about the commendable behaviour of the police by the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Wellbeloved) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North [744](#) (Mr. R. W. Elliott). The hon. Member for The High Peak (Mr. Peter M. Jackson) has raised a number of points of an administrative nature, as he is perfectly entitled to do, and has made certain very serious detailed allegations against the conduct of members of the Metropolitan Police—some of them named, some of them not identified.

The House might think that, if these incidents occurred, very serious offences were committed by the police, and it would have been more seemly for the evidence to be given in court, rather than in the House, where it could have been properly upheld or challenged. This House is not the proper place in which to make random attacks against members of the police force for serious breaches of the law, to say nothing of disciplinary offences.

I am concerned to look a little deeper into the Grosvenor Square incident. I wish to quote a letter which appeared in The Times from Mr. Tariq Ali, who describes himself as the Chairman of the March 17th Ad Hoc Committee. He said in The Times of 21st March: It is interesting to note the hypocritical protestations of Tory and Labour M.P.s who get upset when police horses are hurt, but who remain silent at the mounting violence in Vietnam. It is this attitude we demonstrate against in an attempt to break the silence inflicted on this nation by the two major political parties. He goes on to threaten that he will carry out even more violent demonstrations in future.

The "hypocritical protestations" about the horses certainly had nothing whatever to do with Vietnam, but it is fair to ask: what about the hypocritical protests about Vietnam and against the Americans made by people who are basically anti-American, pro-Communist and pro-Vietcong? What about the hypocrisy of these demonstrators when never a single word is printed, let alone voiced in demonstrations, by them about all the cruelty done elsewhere in the world—the mass murder of the Watutsi, the public hangings of the entire Opposition Front Bench in the Congo, the imprisonment of the Soviet writers, and of Mr. Gerald Brooke, the sacking of the British Embassy in Peking, and the mass murders of civilians in Hue—

[745](#)

§ Mr. Speaker

Order. We are getting deeper and wider than the Adjournment subject.

§ Mr. Iremonger

I am referring to the unfairness of the allegation of hypocrisy against those who protest against the riots in Grosvenor Square when the hypocrisy of the writer of that letter to The Times in not protesting against other things than Vietnam is so egregious.

It is worth underlining the point Mr. Tariq Ali made when he said his object was to break silence about Vietnam. He had some time to organise his demonstration, and during that time it would have been quite possible to nominate Parliamentary candidates in Warwick, Dudley, Meriden and Acton where voice could have been given to protests against Vietnam. That was the opportunity to break silence. Why was it not taken? The reason is that the one thing these people are frightened of is the ballot box—apart from the courts of law—which is the one place where justice can be done. I often tell these armchair militants among my constituents that their proper method of protest is to stand for Parliament and to oppose me. When I do this they melt away into thin air.

What is the nature of these protests? I do not believe, apart from the political activists on the Left wing, it has anything much to do with Vietnam or with any particular issue. It is the expression of a deep mood which subsists generation after generation, and is not related to specific political issues. The people demonstrating in Grosvenor Square are the same kind of people who in the 1930s demonstrated against Spain and as members of the Peace Pledge Union.

§ Mr. Speaker

Whether they were or not is a wider subject than can be dealt with in this specific debate. We are asking the Home Secretary about something for which he is responsible.

§ Mr. Iremonger

We need not take these protestations too tragically or seriously, but there are two things we must take very seriously. The first is that the police should have all our sympathy for the patience they show. The second is that the police should have all our sympathy for the impatience that members of the public show at what seems to them to be over-tolerance by the police in [746](#) dealing with outrageous conduct. Those who protest to me protest against the police not using hoses, and against the police not using more militant and violent methods. I hope the Home Secretary will say to the House that the police methods are right. What these people fear more than the violence they protest against is the decency and tolerance of the British police. That is the most effective weapon in the hands of the forces of law and order, and it is far more dramatic in its effect than more violent methods could be. The tolerance of the police is what is most hated by agitators, and that is why they try to whip up violence, so that the police will be provoked against them.

Finally, I should like to ask, would the hon. Gentleman give the House information, which his Department should have, of the exact nature of the alien element in the crowd? To what extent was stimulus given to the demonstration by people who came to this country from abroad with the express purpose of giving aid and comfort to the enemies of this country among us? Is the Minister keeping a watch on them and making sure they will not be allowed to enter this country again? The House is entitled to know to what extent they were responsible for the violence and what steps the Government are taking to ensure they will not be able to play a similar part in the future.

§ 10.9 p.m.

§ The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Dick Taverne)

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Peter M. Jackson) first dealt with the case of the march going wrong and the course it took. He then dealt with a number of specific issues such as the use of horses, method of crowd control and the search of buses. He dealt also with a number of specific incidents. It is not possible for me on this occasion to deal with the specific incidents. They must be investigated, as they will be. Every complaint will be looked at. I share the view of some hon. Members that he has given a distorted picture of what went on. I do not believe anyone would

guess from the description he gave of what happened in Grosvenor Square that three times as many policemen as demonstrators were injured.

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§ Mr. Peter M. Jackson

Would not my hon. Friend agree that many of the injured demonstrators were taken away by their friends?

§ Mr. Taverne

Many other people received injuries of various kinds, but three times as many policemen as demonstrators required treatment in hospital. That fact alone speaks for itself.

When it comes to the examples that my hon. Friend gave, I must confess that one is somewhat suspicious of some of the allegations made when one finds that there has not been a sufficient attempt to check up on facts. Take the point about the presentation of the petition, which my hon. Friend says was one of the major causes. He says that if only Miss Vanessa Redgrave had been allowed to present her petition, all would have been well.

The fact is that the main body of demonstrators arrived in Grosvenor Square at about 5.30 on that day. At about a quarter to six, Miss Redgrave and a group of members of the Vietnam Ad Hoc Organising Committee arrived at the south-west corner of the Square. They were allowed to pass through the police cordon to hand in a petition at the Embassy. If my hon. Friend had looked a little further, he would have found that that is what Miss Redgrave says herself. Only recently she appears to have told a Daily Express interviewer: I went to the demonstration to deliver a letter. Today I had a polite reply from Ambassador Bruce saying that he had forwarded it to the State Department. That is a rather significant pointer to some of the wild allegations which have been made. There may be something in some of them. I do not know. These matters will have to be investigated.

Let me give the House a picture of what actually happened in the course of the march, because clearly this is very important. I have before me a description given by the officer in command of what happened at the end of the meeting in Trafalgar Square. It says: After the meeting, the head of the procession moved from Trafalgar Square at 3.52 p.m. and the tail moved at 4.17 p.m. Whilst leaving Trafalgar Square, the demonstrators refused to move off in the usual six abreast formation, but linked arms and proceeded to Charing Cross Road and Oxford Street. The procession became a rabble, with demonstrators linking arms across the whole width of the roadway and both footpaths. At times, the leaders came to a halt and remained stationary for several minutes before moving off again. Several private motor cars being used by persons unconnected with the demonstration were rocked to and fro by demonstrators for no apparent reason, whilst other demonstrators sat on the bonnets of motor cars and some climbed over stationary motor cars. The German contingent were particularly militant at this stage and occasionally halted in the roadway until there was a clear space ahead, then, holding their banner poles horizontally with each man in the front rank gripping a pole with both hands, they ran forward in step chanting 'Sieg Heil'. Both footways in Regent Street were crowded with pedestrians in an attempt to get out of the way, many being obviously cowed. Police were fully committed in attempting to keep the demonstration moving but it was apparent, even at that early stage, that the organisers had no control whatever over their supporters. Several groups of demonstrators broke away from the agreed processional route. At Cambridge Circus, the demonstrators came to a halt and occupied the whole road round the Circus after breaking through a police cordon. Approaching Oxford Circus, the head of the

procession was taken over by a group of anarchists and, at the Circus, some demonstrators sat down in the roadway. Then we come to the crucial events in Grosvenor Square, which my hon. Friend attributed to bad management on the part of the police: The first demonstrators, which was the group that had visited Dow Chemicals, entered Grosvenor Square at 5.20 p.m. and followed the agreed route around Grosvenor Square into South Audley Street. At this time, there were about 2,000 supporters of the demonstration and spectators in Grosvenor Square awaiting the arrival of the main body, and at about 5.30 p.m. the main body arrived, coming down North Audley Street and occupying the whole width of the street. The leaders turned east along the north side of Grosvenor Street, but stopped half-way along the road. Their colleagues following behind forced their way into the Square, and extremely serious congestion was caused at the north-west corner. I went to the head of the procession and urged the leaders—there was no sign of organisers or marshalls at that time—to keep moving to relieve the dangerous crowding of their fellow demonstrators. There was a reluctant move for about 20 yards, but the leaders again came to a halt. It was, I assure the House, the loss of control by the leaders of the organisations taking part and the failure of the procession to move round the Square and into South Audley Street, as agreed previously with the organisers, that led to the subsequent disturbances.

[749](#) My hon. Friend spoke of provocation by the police, but it is quite evident that there was a deliberate attempt to provoke the police. Some fairly extensive arrangements had clearly been made in advance by some demonstrators to prepare for violence. This came to the notice of the police, and during Sunday morning coaches containing demonstrators were stopped by the police. They were found to contain six bags of marbles, 81 bags of paint—and I cannot believe that 81 bags of paint were only to paint the banners—three bags of flour, four cannisters, and two bags of pepper. At 3.30 p.m. a constable found a motor van parked in Spring Gardens with 13 smoke bombs and 1,000 plastic bags containing red dye.

My hon. Friend said that not many people were prosecuted. This is right, because in any cases it was not possible to trace particular items to particular individuals, and obviously it would be wrong to prosecute if one could not do so. It was because of these rumours, and this complaint of some sort of violence, that every organisation which had been associated with peaceful demonstrations in the past refused to take part.

I have dealt with the question of the petitions. Let me come now to the point made about the use of horses, and the methods of containment which my hon. Friend mentioned. First, I must express my agreement with my hon. Friend who said that what is so serious about this kind of behaviour is that it prejudices the peaceful right of demonstration with which it would be totally unjustifiable to interfere. We must not be so blinded by wild behaviour, as the Home Secretary said on the day following the disturbance, as to take measures which will prevent persons from demonstrating in good faith.

What are the solutions to this kind of problem? Obviously it would be wrong to proscribe particular organisations which are responsible for such demonstrations. The traditional view has always been—and I hope that we shall maintain it—that persons having similar opinions, whatever one's view of those opinions, should have the right to organise themselves and put forward those opinions, provided they do not go beyond the limits set by the law in the interests of the [750](#) community as a whole. It would be a most dangerous step to proscribe particular organisations. What the law does, quite rightly, is to single out specific actions contrary to the interest of the community, without impairing the right of free speech, of which the right to demonstrate forms a very important part.

If I might look at that generally, I do not think that it is feasible or practicable to try to restrict demonstrations, as someone suggested to particular places like Hyde Park. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has power to prescribe the route followed by demonstrators, but even there, when there are a large number, and when they are determined not to take part, not the organisers, but the others, in the way that is planned, it is clear that they cannot necessarily be confined to the route, and if one has a group of 10,000, by what means could they be confined to Hyde Park if they wanted to move into nearby streets? It is also impossible to limit in any way the number of persons who are taking part in any demonstration.

There is the question of the rôle played by certain foreign students. This matter was raised tonight. I think that one should freely allow foreign visitors entry into this country, subject to the usual rules irrespective of their political views, and it has not been the practice to refuse to admit foreign nationals here if they are going to take part in peaceful demonstrations of a political nature. The genuine pacifist who comes here to take part in pacifist business is someone who should be allowed to do so. But this does not mean that we have to admit someone who was known, on reasonable evidence, to be coming here to foment disorder, or to express views which are likely to lead to a breach of the peace, or whose presence would be likely to make it more difficult to maintain law and order. In deciding whether or not we should admit a foreign national we take account of all available evidence, including the record of conduct on occasions such as that we saw on that particular Sunday. The admission of foreign nationals is a matter of discretion for the Home Secretary and, in the light of recent experience, my right hon. Friend will not hesitate to exercise his powers under the Aliens Order in a manner which public interest requires, but one does not want to exclude people [751](#) from visiting this country if they have adequate financial resources and friends, because of their political views. That would be quite wrong, and I am sure the House would not want the Home Secretary to exclude people on those grounds.

[§ Mr. Iremonger](#)

Were the police able to get the names of the little red Nazis, who goose-stepped with their banners?

[§ Mr. Taverne](#)

I would not like to conclude that they were all little red Nazis. There were individuals, whose names were, I think, noted. I cannot speak about this more generally, but there might well be cases in the future in which there would be individuals who would not be allowed entry into this country if it were thought likely that they would abuse the occasion to foment disorder and cause injury and damage.

[§ Mr. Eldon Griffiths \(Bury St. Edmunds\)](#)

Could the hon. and learned Gentleman say if he has had any expression of regret from the German Embassy in this country or any indication that they are willing to assist the British authorities in restraining people who are coming here to make trouble?

[§ Mr. Taverne](#)

I cannot answer that question. I am not aware of anything in the nature of such assistance. It might be very difficult for the Embassy to assist us in controlling the entry of particular individuals. Again, I think it would be quite wrong to regard a particular group of highly organised, highly militant students behaving in a particular way as in any way representative of German students.

Let me come now to the more particular questions. My hon. Friend has talked about physical barriers, but it is really rather difficult to envisage what certain kinds of physical barriers could do to deal with a crowd of something like 10,000 which is in a fairly disturbed state. It might be possible to put buses there, but the buses might suffer considerable damage as a result of being in the way. The most common suggestion which has been made, particularly by many members of the public, is that the police should use hoses. It seems to me that there is a great deal to be said for not departing from the traditional methods. Indeed, on this occasion, [752](#) generally speaking, I would have thought that the reputation of the police in the country was higher as a result of their use of traditional methods to contain this particular demonstration than it would have been had hoses been used. It would be a short step from hoses to tear gas, and a short step from tear gas to the use of steel helmets and shields. I would think it best to leave the Commissioner to direct and control his men in well established ways if he is satisfied that in this way control can be maintained, and the officer in charge on this occasion was satisfied that traditional methods could keep things under control, and they did so.

My hon. Friend has rightly raised the question of the use of horses. It is recognised by the police and the Home Office that mounted police should be used on such occasions only as a last resort. As the Home Secretary explained to the House when he answered Questions on 18th March, the officer in command of the police in Grosvenor Square on the previous day had been very reluctant to use the mounted officers, who had been held in reserve, but the situation became so difficult—and I think everyone could see the nature of the situation from the television reports—that to continue to hold them back would have led to greater damage and greater injuries. That was his view and I do not think anyone is in a position to question the judgment of the officer in charge on that occasion. I can tell my hon. Friend that he mounted police are essentially a reserve force, a highly trained reserve, to restore order and prevent injury, and to do so quickly.

I come back to my hon. Friend's complaints. Complaints will be investigated, and cannot be dealt with in a debate. I cannot deal with the question of photographers. Photographers did present a difficulty because of the very nature of their work in trying to get action pictures as close to the action as possible, which means that they are bound to get in the way when policemen are rushing from one place to another. But there has been no approach to newspapers to prevent photographs from being published; indeed, were published. The television coverage was clearly elaborate.

I am glad that my hon. Friend believes that, as a whole, restraint and self-discipline were shown—he has admitted [753](#) this. This is true of the National Council for Civil Liberties as well. The public reaction is also clear. Of the letters which we have received in the Home Office, an overwhelming proportion have commended the work of the police. Some, indeed, asked for more violent methods of crowd control, but those letters praising the police have outnumbered by more than ten to one those complaining about the police.

If one compares the way in which this demonstration was handled and was seen to be handled with the scenes which one often sees in other countries of these demonstrations being handled with such aids as shields and helmets, hoses and tear gas, one must conclude that the way in which our police handled this very difficult situation, in which there was bound to be a conflict of evidence and some clash, is something of which the whole nation may be proud.

[§ 10.27 p.m.](#)

[§ Mr. Albert Murray \(Gravesend\)](#)

It is right that my hon. and learned Friend should have paid that tribute to the police, whose demonstration in the square that Sunday was commendable. There are provocations in these cases. People talk about the provocation of police horses, but I might point out to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Peter M. Jackson) that some people are [754](#) provoked by beards, but that does not mean that there has to be counter-violence. The figures of police and civilians injured show where most of the violence was directed.

Many of us on this side have demonstrated in all sorts of causes and one thing which stands out is the co-operation between police and demonstrators ensuring that things go right. One often feels sorry for police who march beside demonstrations and get footsore but ensure that good humour always prevails.

I was concerned about the number of weapons found at this demonstration. It seemed that people came armed after seeing some of the posters with, perhaps, a little addition by someone else. Many people might take it, judging from the statements in the Sun on 19th March by Tariq Ali, that they came with violence aforethought because they felt that words were no longer enough.

It is a good thing that many hon. Members have said that the police did a fine job and that they needed all the support, not only of the House but of the public, to do their job properly for the protection of persons and property.

[§](#) Question put and agreed to.

[§](#) Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

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