

Demonstrations on 26th and 27th October 1968

The Home Secretary, accompanied by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and Sir Philip Allen, saw the following newspaper proprietors on Thursday, 17th October at 10 a.m.:-

Sir Max Aitken	Chairman, Beaverbrook Newspapers
The Rt. Hon. Lord Aylestone	Chairman, Independent Television Authority
The Hon. David Astor	Chairman and Editor, Observer
Mr. P. W. Gibbins	Joint Chairman, Guardian
Mr. Dennis Hamilton	Chairman of Times Newspapers Limited
Lord Hartwell	Representing Chairman of Daily Telegraph Limited
Mr. E. D. Pickering	Chairman, International Publishing Company
Lord Rothermere	Chairman, Associated Newspapers Limited
Mr. Mark Chapman Walker	Chairman and Joint Managing Director, News of the World
Mr. O. J. Whitley (Chief Assistant to the Director-General)	Representing Lord Hill, Chairman, Board of Governors, B.B.C.

2. The Home Secretary said that he had summoned the meeting because the demonstrations raised questions of policy on which he would be answerable to Parliament. The demonstration on 27th October was clearly going to be a serious occasion. It raised the question whether exceptional action should be taken to restrict it, but he had decided against this. His attitude was that the demonstrators should have every freedom to demonstrate, but it was a freedom under the law, and if the law was broken, the police would bring those responsible before the court and the courts would, he hoped, take appropriate action. In the light of demonstrations earlier this year, the police had certain obligations, as they were responsible for bringing a lot of people into Central London. He would watch particularly the conduct of the leaders of the demonstration and would take a poor view of them if they appeared at the beginning to be photographed and then melted away as the demonstration got under way. But the most worrying feature was the appearance of certain splinter groups, mainly Trotskyists and anarchists, who were primarily interested in provoking violence. In these circumstances television and newspaper cameras were ^{not} neutral but inevitably themselves contributed to the atmosphere. There was a feeling among the police that the published photographs tended to concentrate on some retaliation by a police officer, rather than on the blow by a demonstrator which provoked the police officer. The Home Secretary said that he was sure that he could be confident that the newspaper proprietors were aware of that feeling.

The Home Secretary also made these points:-

- (a) The Daily Telegraph had been wrong in its account of his policy on the admission of aliens in this context. He was taking steps to exclude people coming from abroad for the demonstration who had a conviction for violence in our courts or their own courts. For the rest it was neither appropriate nor practicable to apply a sort of political censorship and decide that one demonstrator should be let in and that another should not.
- (b) The role and tactics of the police would follow traditional lines. If this had not been intended, the Commissioner of Police would have wanted to consult the Home Secretary about it, and he had not done so.
- (c) The organising committee for the main demonstration was incurring a substantial loss every month. The Home Secretary was sure that the newspapers would bear this in mind in any contacts they were disposed to make.

4. The Commissioner of Police said that there had been some criticism that the police had not been sufficiently forthcoming with information about the demonstration. They had wanted to keep the temperature down but fully realised the considerable news interest involved. He then gave the following information:-

- (a) The demonstration on 26th October was likely to be a slight affair, though there had been a story that the Stock Exchange would be attacked on Friday, 25th October.
- (b) On 27th October there would be one big procession starting from the Embankment at 2 p.m. and would include sincere opponents of the war in Vietnam who wanted an ordinary demonstration. The march would be joined by the Federation of Anarchists, and the original leaders would try but fail to control all the procession. A figure of 20,000 - 30,000 had been estimated as the number likely to be in the procession, but 15,000 could be the upper limit. The Commissioner of Police described the proposed line of march and the stops for handing in petitions or sit-down protests.
- (c) There would be a second march organised by an ad hoc committee under Maoist leadership. This was intended to start with speeches in Trafalgar Square and end with a march on the American Embassy. This group might feel isolated in Trafalgar Square and join the first march as it passed.
- (d) The Commissioner of Police mentioned the following vulnerable points on the line of the main march:-

the offices of the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Express and possibly The Times: Australia House with a possible diversion towards the I.T.N. Studios: Rhodesia House and South Africa House: the Treasury: the Ministry of Defence (a very likely target): Great and New Scotland Yard: the Home Office: Downing Street: the Hilton Hotel and the Playboy Club, with a possible diversion in the direction of the American Embassy.

- (c) The vulnerable points on the Maoists' march were:-
New Zealand House: the United States Trade Centre: the American Express:
the Spanish and Greek tourist offices and shops in Oxford Street.
The police had invited the main buildings on the route to make their own internal security arrangements and advised them to see that internal doors were locked and that men were inside to deal with incidents. The police would not be inside the buildings themselves.
- (f) The forms of violent behaviour would be largely as on previous occasions. The police did not think that the use of firearms or extreme forms of explosives was probable. There might be a use of the German demonstrators' technique of having a large massed advance by demonstrators with the front row carrying a telegraph pole; this was very difficult to counter. There was nothing specifically known at present which made it necessary to close roads in advance but some ad hoc arrangements would probably have to be made on the day. As the Home Secretary had said, there were no bans or special restrictions on the procession; militant demonstrators would have liked this to happen as an excuse for violence.
- (g) About 7000 police officers would be on duty from the Metropolitan police force, and there was no need to call in help from neighbouring forces. Special Constables would be used in strength to look after police stations. There would be about 150 mounted officers; police horses were a traditional and effective means of crowd control. A special mobile group would be active before the demonstration started. Dogs would not be used. For the police officers there had been a certain amount of special training at Hendon in the use of wedge techniques and in improving response speeds. The police would have no special offensive or defensive equipment. Even the use of barricades in front of the United States Embassy would be too provocative. The communications system used by the police had been specially improved for the occasion.
- (h) The demonstrators would circulate wild and highly exaggerated rumours, particularly about police action and might, for instance, say that tear gas had been used. Their basic aim was to lower police morale, and if they were to succeed in this, the position would undoubtedly be serious. The Commissioner of Police specially asked the proprietors to ensure that if their newspapers received rumours about the demonstration, they should check with the Public Relations Department at Scotland Yard, or the Operations Department, whichever Department was appropriate, where they would be given as much help as was possible.

5. Mr. Astor asked whether thought had been given to the possibility of altering the mood of the occasion by introducing sellers of balloons and hot dogs. The Commissioner said that there would certainly be substantial numbers of people who were mainly spectators on a Sunday outing in London, which was partly why he had to be very cautious in the tactics used by the police. The Home Secretary said that Mr. Astor's suggestion was ingenious, but nothing was likely to affect the conduct of the militants, who were the real trouble-makers.
6. Lord Rothermere said that if the leaders of the demonstration were likely to slip away in the afternoon, how were they likely to be picked up by the police for offences and so acquire the conviction for violence which would enable the Home Secretary to keep them out of the country. The Home Secretary said that the leaders of the demonstration did not come from abroad.
7. Sir Max Aitken asked if the people in the Daily Express building should go out after any demonstrators who broke into their building and were expelled. The Commissioner said that any action outside the building should be left to the police.
8. One proprietor asked whether the militant trouble makers would break away from the main demonstration after going with it for a time or would emerge from elsewhere after the demonstration had got under way. The Commissioner said that in general the militants would be in the main demonstration to start with, but were likely to form marauding bands towards the end. 5 - 6 p.m. was the dangerous time. It should not be assumed, if the procession had passed a particular building, that that building was safe, as the militant group might return.
9. In reply to Lord Rothermere, the Commissioner said that the organisers would be allowed to use loud-speaker vans and would probably behave reasonably on this point.
10. Sir Max Aitken then asked whether the courts could be relied on to deal appropriately with the offenders. The Home Secretary said that he had to be careful about this but he would personally like to see some severe short sentences imposed. The Commissioner added that it would be particularly helpful if the cases were dealt with quickly.
11. Lord Rothermere said that he did not feel that there was any prejudice at all in the selection of photographs by newspapers. The Home Secretary said that he had been making no complaint.

12. Lord Aylestone said that there was a sound technical reason for photographers concentrating on the police action in a scuffle, since by the time the cameras had focussed, the demonstrators had done their provocation and the police were then dealing with it. The Commissioner said that the Granada film on 16th October had been very good.

13. Mr. Hamilton said that The Times building was in the City of London and he hoped that there was no boundary problems preventing effective police action. He noticed that the Commissioner of Police for the City of London was not present at the meeting. The Home Secretary said that ^{was} because he was the police authority for the Metropolitan police force only. He suggested that Mr. Hamilton should speak to the City police. The Commissioner assured Mr. Hamilton that the police boundary would make no difference at all and that there was excellent co-operation between the two forces. Mr. Hamilton said that he was already in touch with the City police.

14. Another proprietor asked if the Saturday night publication of Sunday newspapers was likely to be interfered with. The Commissioner said that no plans for this were known to the police. If the militants got into newspaper offices, their main object would simply be to occupy the building.

15. Mr. Hamilton asked what demonstrations were likely after 27th October. The Commissioner said that this demonstration was likely to be the demonstration to end all demonstrations. The Home Secretary thought that Vietnam was probably nearly exhausted as a subject for demonstrations but others would arise.

RCC

18th October, 1968.

Copies to: Mr. Daly
Mrs. Sanders
Mr. Waddell
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