

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Atkins' Statement on Northern Ireland Bombs

A copy of Mr. Atkins' Statement and a list of the incidents which took place yesterday are attached. The House was very quiet and serious about the Northern Ireland security position this morning.

In answer to Questions, Mr. Atkins said that he was reviewing security on public transport generally and that he was constantly looking at ways of improving security. ~~generally.~~

Ian Paisley welcomed the fact that a Statement had been made and said that he hoped that there would be ^{Statement on} similar occasions in future. He suggested that the security forces should move from the defensive to the offensive and carry the battle into the heart of the I.R.A.'s territory. Mr. Atkins said that he was always ready to make Statements if the occasion seemed appropriate and that Mr. Paisley should not think that the operations of the security forces were entirely reactive. That was not so, and there had been a number of useful successes in the recent past.

Winston Churchill demanded the return of the death penalty for acts of terrorism. Mr. Atkins said that the House had debated the death penalty since the Election and had reached a decision. Mr. Biggs-Davison said that Mr. Atkins should consider with Irish Ministers the possibility of the re-introduction of very selective detention on both sides of the border, since this had proved the only effective tactic in dealing with Irish terrorism in the past. Mr. Atkins said that it was true that he had detention powers, and that he was always considering how best to use all the powers he had, but detention had not been employed since 1975.

Tony Marlow said that the interrogation methods permitted in Northern Ireland were suited more to shoplifters in Surrey than hardened terrorists; and that many people were afraid to come forward and give evidence because they were frightened of the consequences for themselves. Mr. Atkins said that the securing of evidence was not easy but that everyone had a part to play in providing information and intelligence. The Government's aim was to get convictions by legal means.

Peter Robinson called for a new initiative on security. Mr. Atkins said that the House had debated the security position immediately before Christmas and had supported the Government.

There were no difficulties about any of this, but it has committed us to making Statements on similar occasions in future. This may not be a bad thing.

MS

18 January 1980

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PRIME MINISTER

I attach a note about Mr. Atkins' Statement this morning. His Office have since confirmed that one of the men who was injured in the train explosion yesterday is well known to them and they hope that he will be charged. The woman who was killed in the explosion was his girlfriend, who may also have been involved in the carrying of the bomb. The other two people who died were a 17-year-old student and a Nigerian accountant, both of whom were entirely innocent.

MJS

18 January 1980

SECRET

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Nick Sanders Esq
10 Downing Street
London
SW1.

18 January 1980

Dear Nick,

I now enclose a copy of the statement made by my Secretary of State this morning: in the circumstances it was not possible to get it to you before the statement was made.

You may find it useful to have with the statement the enclosed list of yesterday's incidents.

Yours ever,

R. Harrington

R. A. Harrington

Statement dated 18th January 1980.

17.1.80.

With permission Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about the fatal bombing incident in Northern Ireland yesterday evening. Just before six o'clock yesterday evening there was an explosion followed by a fire on a Ballymena to Belfast train in the vicinity of Dunmurry.

The explosion occurred in a carriage immediately in front of the engine, which was at the rear of the train. As a result 3 people died and 5 others were injured and taken to hospital. The bodies of those who died are so badly charred that their identity can only be established by a process of elimination, and this is in hand. Of the injured, 3 were seriously burned and were detained in hospital. The explosive device used is believed to be of the blast incendiary type, and police enquiries into the incident are continuing. Up to the present moment no individual terrorist organisation has claimed responsibility for the outrage. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the device exploded prematurely.

I am sure I carry the House with me in expressing my deep sympathy with those innocent members of the public who were injured, and with the relatives of those who died. The incidents of the last three days have yet again brought home the utter callousness of the terrorists in their continued attempts to destroy the life of the

E.R.

Province. Last night's brutal murders and the attempted murder of many others have made this clear.

But despite the terrorists' efforts the bravery and dedication to duty of the people of Northern Ireland remains unshaken. My hon friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State who visited the scene of last night's fatal incident has told me of the courage of the staff of the Northern Ireland Railways who dealt with two devices ~~on~~ two other trains which did not explode.

The people of Northern Ireland are determined not to give in to such cowardly attempts to intimidate them. Her Majesty's Government is equally determined to give them the fullest possible security backing.

E.B.

SITUATION REPORT FOR THE PERIOD:

0830 HOURS THURSDAY 17 JANUARY 1980 TO 0830 HOURS FRIDAY 18 JANUARY 1980

- 1755 hours - Explosion on Lisburn/Belfast train as it passed under bridge at Black's Road, Dunmurry. Three dead - burned beyond recognition. Four injured - burns - not serious.
- 1835 hours - Device spotted on Belfast/Carrickfergus train. Removed from train at Greenisland and exploded on platform. No injuries.
- 1750 hours - Three men (armed) entered Auto Supplies, Scotch Street, Dungannon. Gave staff 10 minutes warning. Planted several devices which exploded causing fierce fire and extensive damage. No injuries.
- 1755 hours - Shooting incident at Boveva, Dungiven, Co Tyrone. Wm James REA of same address - ex-UDR member - was driving to a potato yard to collect some employees. A car with at least 2 persons drew up alongside. REA heard a shot and returned 2 shots from his legally held Browning pistol at close range. No known injuries. Hospitals in area are being checked.
- 1820 hours - Device spotted on train at York Road Station, Belfast. Thrown onto platform and exploded. No injuries.
- 1825 hours - Explosion at the Carlton Hotel, Belleek, Co Fermanagh. Hotel gutted. No injuries.
- 2114 hours - Explosion at McKinleys furniture store, Maghera, Co Londonderry, Minor damage. No injuries.

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