

PRIME MINISTER

overtake

Home Affairs 2

Mr. Whitelaw's Statement on Bristol

The Home Secretary's statement (copy attached) went off very well today. The House was very quiet, and was not disposed to argue seriously for a public enquiry. There was support for Mr. Whitelaw from William Waldegrave, Michael Colvin and Arthur Palmer, but not a great deal from Tony Benn.

No new commitments were given, and I think that the Home Secretary has successfully put this matter to bed for the time being.

Mr. Nott's Statement on Tenerife

Mr. Nott made a short statement about the Tenerife air crash. It was received with appropriate expressions of sympathy from all sides of the House. Mr. Nott undertook to report back to the House as soon as he could provide any further information.

MS

28 April 1980

Copied to Disasters:
Dan Air Boeing 727
crash in Tenerife: Apr
1980.

28-4-80

~~HOME SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ON THE DISTURBANCES IN BRISTOL ON~~
TO BE CHECKED
AGAINST DELIVERY
2 APRIL 1980

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement to the House on the serious disturbances that occurred in Bristol on 2 April 1980.

I have considered the full and clear report which I have had from the Chief Constable of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary, and I have placed in the Vote Office a memorandum containing an account of the disturbances, of the difficulties which faced the police, and of how they sought to deal with them.

In the light of the memorandum, there will not, I believe, be dispute about the facts. What began as a normal operation into possible criminal offences, turned sharply and unexpectedly into serious public disorder. The memorandum also sets out the Chief Constable's conclusions and recommendations for future arrangements in his force area. A number of important lessons have been learned from this event. The Chief Constable has acknowledged frankly that there were points at which decisions might, with hindsight, have been taken differently. But he remains of the opinion that the decision to regroup his officers away from the area

/of St. Paul's

of St. Paul's was, in the face of great violence and extensive injuries to the police, a necessary step. In the light of his report, I understand the reasons for that decision, as, I am sure, will the House.

There can be no excuse for the lawlessness which then followed. But we must ensure that however quickly or fiercely public disorder may occur, the police are able swiftly to restore the peace and enforce the law.

We must therefore concern ourselves with the more general lessons which must be learned from these events, not only for the efficiency of policing, but also for good community relations. There are three ways in which I believe we can best move forward.

First, in this country we rightly wish the police to maintain order through traditional methods but, if that is so, police forces must be able to call rapidly on sufficient trained officers. I am, therefore, asking senior officials in my Department and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, in conjunction with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and the Association of Chief Police Officers in England and Wales, to examine thoroughly and urgently the arrangements

/for handling

for handling spontaneous public disorder. I shall publish the results of that review.

But we must not look simply at the policing aspects of these events. We must look much more widely in our search for solutions to the underlying problem. Second, therefore, the Government particularly welcomes the decision of the Select Committee on Home Affairs to look into racial disadvantage and, as a part of that work, to study the St. Paul's area of Bristol. We shall do all we can to help the Select Committee in this work.

But action at local level is also essential. I welcome the decision of the Avon County Council and the Bristol City Council to come together to examine how best they can further help in strengthening good community relations in the area. Experts from all the Government Departments concerned will play a full part in this examination.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that this three-fold approach is the best way to respond positively and constructively to these events.