

TO BE CHECKED
AGAINST DELIVERY

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

22 JANUARY 1985

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.

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 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.

Mr. Speaker]

hon. and learned Member for Aberavon—I am surprised that he does not know this with regard to private notice questions and I will reaffirm the position for the benefit of the House—it is not part of our conventions that the refusal of, or even application for, a private notice question is mentioned in the Chamber. And if it is not mentioned in the Chamber, it is certainly not mentioned on the radio. I hope, therefore, that what occurred will not happen again.

Regarding the sub judice rule, I take careful advice on what matters are sub judice, and the position is absolutely clear. The rule is designed to ensure that those who may be before the courts have their rights protected. It would be wrong—I am sure that the whole House accepts that it would be wrong—if anything said here prejudiced a trial. The House would not want that and we should not allow it.

Brighton Bombing (Hoddinott Report)

3.38 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the conclusions of the inquiry into security arrangements for last year's Conservative party conference.

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 30lb 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 inquiries 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. Inquiries to trace him and other inquiries 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 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 is meeting to discuss the report with the chief constable tomorrow.

Mr. Hoddinott has conducted a comprehensive and detailed inquiry 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.

Mr. Hoddinott's 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 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

debate when Standing Order No. 10 applications are made later, so that those who were interested in the opening rounds can continue the debate about the miners later?

Mr. Speaker: That is an extremely hypothetical question.

Mr. Atkinson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was by no means claiming precedence over my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I wish to raise a question arising from the statement that you made to the House, in which you said that you were satisfied that the security matters involved in the Ponting case were extremely sensitive. Have you examined all those papers to ensure that you are satisfied, or are you taking instructions from the Attorney-General, who suggested—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a wholly unworthy comment from an hon. Member with the experience of the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Atkinson).

Mr. Atkinson: It is by no means an unworthy comment from myself—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] I will certainly not withdraw anything, following the yapping of Conservative Members. All of us here have an equal responsibility to ensure that the rights of Back Bench Members and of the House are protected, but Mr. Speaker has ruled that we must be prevented from discussing those important matters. Some of us believe that he has accepted, on the surface and without examination, the fact that sensitive matters are involved that may not be discussed by the House. I am asking the simple and genuine question: are you satisfied, Mr. Speaker, from your examination, that these matters are, as the Attorney-General claims, too sensitive for the House to discuss?

Mr. Speaker: Order. First of all, I say to the hon. Gentleman that I take instructions from absolutely nobody. Secondly, I must tell him that my responsibility in such matters is to ensure that the sub judice rule is not breached, in order that those who are in the courts will not have their trials prejudiced. That is a responsibility that every hon. Member should discharge equally.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does that mean that questions to the Attorney-General about the criteria for vetting are out of order? Further, it will be within your recollection, Mr. Speaker, that on 9 October at Bow Street magistrates' court, Mr. Roy Amlot, on behalf of the prosecution, said that no security issues were involved. Can Parliament be told what has happened between 9 October and late January to make the position different?

Mr. Speaker: I have looked carefully into the application of the sub judice rule to this case, and I am satisfied that my ruling is correct. I cannot go beyond that.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The whole House listened with great care to the answer that you gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on the crucial question of the operation of the sub judice rule in this case. Did your answer rule out the decision to hold the trial in secret? You covered the case and the vetting of the jury, but is the House debarred from discussing and voting on the decision to hold the trial in secret?

Mr. Speaker: That is clearly not a matter for me.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not wish to prolong this matter, but surely it is only for the trial judge to decide, upon the application of the Crown, whether the trial should be held in secret. Will not the trial judge make that ruling after hearing submissions from the Crown and the defence?

Mr. Speaker: That may be the factual case. As I said to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), it is not for me to decide whether the case should be heard in secret.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We must be clear about what the Attorney-General is saying. Did he rise on a point of order, or is what he said open to questions? We were told about only one aspect of the dialogue with Mr. Ponting's solicitors. After the bowdlerised version was requested and that request turned down by the Attorney-General, were Mr. Ponting's solicitors consulted before the decision was taken to reveal the full document and to hear the entire case in camera? Those are detailed questions. What surprised many people was that the Attorney-General went as far as he did on a point of order, and now seems to have closed down further questions on what he said.

Mr. Speaker: The House will have heard the Attorney-General say, "Further to that point of order." That phrase is not a statement and although the matter could, on a subsequent occasion, be subject to questioning, it is not this afternoon.

Mr. Strang: Further to the point of order I raised earlier, Mr. Speaker—and I am grateful for your indulgence—may I ask whether the House is to be allowed to express a view on the decision to hold the trial in secret?

Mr. Speaker: Not on this matter at this moment. There are other methods of drawing attention to the issue; I notice that there is an early-day motion on the Order Paper today dealing with the general issue. I have this afternoon simply given a factual ruling on the specific matter in the courts.

Mr. John Morris rose—

Mr. Speaker: After hearing the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), the Shadow Attorney-General, we shall have to move on.

Mr. John Morris: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House will be grateful, despite my failure to obtain permission to table a private notice question, that the Attorney-General has at last risen to his feet to clarify some of the issues. It will be within your recollection, Mr. Speaker, that I sought to table a question and to obtain guidance from you many weeks ago regarding the sub judice rule on another matter and you ruled that I could not raise those matters. Subsequently, in the course of an exchange in the House, the Attorney-General spelt out in detail precisely the matters that I was not able, on your ruling, to raise with him. In view of that, is it not high time that the sub judice rule was examined to ensure that it applies equally to all hon. Members of the House?

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not propose to take any further points of order on this matter. To answer the right

or 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 it 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 for co-ordinating the counter-measures required to meet them. Those central arrangements are now fully in place and I believe that they have already proved their value.

However, 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 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 right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Defence, for Northern Ireland and for Scotland to involve the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary 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.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The safety and security of Her Majesty's Government are matters which transcend party politics; it is that absolute principle which governs the response of Her Majesty's Opposition to the Home Secretary's statement. That being so, I have to say that, on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, I find it impossible to make any properly informed comment on what the Home Secretary has told the House. I am frankly astonished that access to the full Hoddinott report has not been made available to the appropriate representatives of Her Majesty's Opposition on Privy Councillor terms.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) assures me, as a former Home Secretary, that he would have arranged for such confidential access, especially as the Home Secretary acknowledges that this matter is of importance not merely to the Conservative party but to other political parties. Although it is entirely right and proper to involve the relevant party representatives in the activities of the working group which is to be set up, I would have expected the Home Secretary himself to discuss these matters with the appropriate representatives of the political parties that are represented in this House.

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

The Home Secretary's statement raises a number of disturbing matters. I pay tribute to the dedicated work of the police, the fire, the ambulance service and the other public services in Brighton three months ago. All of us owe them a profound debt for the hazards that they readily risked on behalf of the entire community. The police did to the very best of their ability all that they were asked to do, but they were not always given the right orders. We have heard of the inadequate search of the ministerial floor of the Grand hotel. That is very worrying indeed.

The Home Secretary said that Mr. Hoddinott's judgment is that, on the basis of procedures that then seemed reasonable and likely to be acceptable to those concerned, the Sussex police are not to be criticised for the fact that the bomb hidden on the sixth floor was not discovered. However, the fact must be faced that, on the basis of the inadequate search, a bomb on the first floor might not have been discovered either. Also very worrying is the inadequate co-operation between the hotel management and the police. Without proper information, it is impossible to be sure, but I have to be convinced that it would have been out of the question to conduct a more thorough search, even if not a totally thorough search, of the other floors of the hotel.

While I accept that it would not have been possible to seal the entrances to the hotel and search thoroughly all who sought entrance, some searching of portable items could and should have been considered. After all, many shops and places of entertainment make the effort, even without the presence of members of the Cabinet on their premises.

Furthermore, I should have thought that it made sense to study the security practices in other countries that face comparable problems, to establish whether there are lessons that we can learn. From what has been made available to the House, I find the report inadequate and complacent. The secure continuance of the Queen's Government and political life in this country are fundamental to our democracy and the public requires better reassurance that it has been given this afternoon.

Mr. Brittan: I think that the right hon. Gentleman will want to reconsider what he has said in the light of full consideration of my statement, because he seems to have failed to understand that what I had to say was in two parts. First, I was giving the House an account of Mr. Hoddinott's report, which was made independently by a distinguished police officer, made essentially to the chief constable of Sussex, and for wider consideration as well. I then went on to give an account of the response to that report, which the right hon. Gentleman may not have fully appreciated.

I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman regrets not having had access to the full Hoddinott report. I assure him that there is a precedent for the procedure whereby a document which on security grounds cannot be published is summarised and the summary is placed in the House. I also assure him that Mr. Hoddinott is satisfied that all the criticisms made in his full report are properly and adequately reflected in the summary, which I hope the right hon. Gentleman will study carefully.

What the right hon. Gentleman said about the deficiencies found by Mr. Hoddinott merely repeats what I said in my statement. Mr. Hoddinott did not say that a

more full search of the premises was out of the question. He merely explained why it did not take place and what the consequences of such a search would have been.

As to the experience of other countries, I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the group, set up with the wide membership to which I have referred, will have every opportunity to consider the experience of other countries, and will want to do that in its work. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Government's response in setting up this new and broadly based group and encouraging the participation of the political parties in the working out of practical, acceptable arrangements for party conferences and other events in the coming months is a serious response to a situation the gravity of which I have no reason whatsoever to underestimate.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his detailed and full statement will be widely welcomed in Brighton and the whole of Sussex? As it was a full and detailed statement, will he confirm two points that will be immediately in the minds of Brighton and Sussex people tonight? First, did the Sussex police co-operate fully in the inquiry and, secondly, subject to the inquiry now being conducted by the Sussex police, is there reason to believe that they fell down on their duty in any respect?

Mr. Brittan: It is the case that the Sussex police co-operated fully in the inquiry, and I assure my right hon. Friend that the full extent of both the criticisms and the praise made by Mr. Hoddinott about the Sussex police were adequately reflected both in the summary and in what I have said to the House.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Although Mr. Hoddinott has said that the Sussex police are not to be criticised for failing to find the bomb, does the Home Secretary agree that there remain substantial questions over the part played by Metropolitan police officers? In particular, will he confirm that, some two weeks before the explosion, a purported search was carried out by Metropolitan police officers, which Sussex police has had every reason to believe was thorough?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman also confirm that, whereas a search was carried out of the first floor, on which Cabinet Ministers were staying, the officers carrying out that search forgot to search the suite of the right hon. and learned Gentleman himself? Does there not remain a need for a thorough-going inquiry into the level of co-operation by the Metropolitan police and the Sussex police, particularly relating to criminal intelligence?

Mr. Brittan: I do not agree with much of what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said. In particular, there is nothing to warrant the criticism of the Metropolitan police. I do not know the basis for making it. As to the search of the first floor premises, I made it clear in my statement that there was a criticism of the fact that those premises were not searched thoroughly and that criticism of the failure to establish responsibility for who should conduct such a search was one of the features of the Hoddinott report. The hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say that, of the three relevant suites, two were searched and the one that was not was mine.

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): The deputy chief constable of Hampshire has done a valuable service to the nation. In examining this appalling incident,

number of lessons have been learnt, and he has the advantage of hindsight. The Sussex police and the chief constable of Sussex have come under some unreasonable criticism since the incident. The House should remember that the morale of that force is bound to be hurt by unfair, unjustified and unsubstantiated criticism.

Will my right hon. Friend say yet again that it is clear that there was no justification for most of the attacks upon the Sussex police, or for the scurrilous attacks on the integrity and professional ability of the chief constable? Will he confirm that nobody could have expected that explosive device to be found unless the hotel had literally been taken apart brick by brick? Will he confirm that nobody who was in Brighton at that time, or who has ever attended a party conference, would think that one could conceivably begin to search the hundreds of people who go in and out of a major conference hotel? From what we have already heard from my right hon. and learned Friend the report clearly vindicates the efficiency and professional conduct of the Sussex police, and it will be welcomed by the people of Sussex and the nation as a whole.

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I endorse what he has said. As I said in my statement, the general conclusion of Mr. Hoddinott was that, against the background that I have described, the Sussex police made proper and reasonable plans and implemented them properly and efficiently. The criticisms of detail have to be seen against that general finding. It is also worth mentioning that, in the group under Sir Lawrence Byford, which will be seeking to reach agreement with the parties about security arrangements for conferences and similar functions, among those who will be assisting Sir Lawrence Byford will be the chief constable of Sussex, Mr. Roger Birch, and Mr. Hoddinott himself.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Home Secretary accept that the starting point for anything he wants to do, and in which the House will support him, has to be based on the fact that there is a large number of paramilitary groups on both sides of the divide in Northern Ireland who believe in killing, and who will do it again? Will he accept that the fuss, properly made, during the last three months because something happened here gave them nothing but joy, and that they will try again? Anything that we in the House can do to help the Home Secretary, we shall do. He has said that the new committee he will set up will draw information from the Army. I hope that this will be only on its knowledge of bomb disposal. When he goes wider on intelligence, will he make absolutely sure that it is the police who are in charge of all of it, because there is nothing the paramilitaries would like better than that they should drive us in a direction that weakens our democracy and our party conferences because they do not believe in democracy?

Mr. Brittan: I can unhesitatingly endorse every word that the right hon. Gentleman has said, without qualification. The responsibility of the police is paramount. In regard to the Army and the security service serving as part of the group under Home Office chairmanship, I am referring to particular forms of expertise which can be drawn upon and then conveyed in the form of advice and co-ordination to the police, whose task is precisely what the right hon. Gentleman has said.

If I may say so, not only is it the task of the police operationally to deal with these matters, but the tripartite relationship of the Home Office, the police authority and the chief constable is underlined by what has occurred here, where the report is a report to the chief constable, its wider aspects are being canvassed in the House and its detailed application to Sussex will be a matter to be discussed between the chief constable and his authority, which is meeting tomorrow.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Is not one of the clear lessons that the technology of terror is now developing more rapidly than the capability of the security forces to deal with it? In that context may I welcome what I have urged in the House several times—the fact that the very real experience of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is now to be more effectively used on this side of the water? I wish to ask my right hon. and learned Friend specific questions. What is to be the relationship of the TIGER committee, the committee for terrorist information gathering, evaluation and review, with the new working party that he is setting up? Will he give to the House an assurance that this new body will ensure that the collation and dissemination of counter-terrorist intelligence are more effective and that the sharing of the methods of dealing with terrorism will not be impeded by vicious and misleading attacks on the men and women of the special branch and the security service who risk their lives to protect us?

Mr. Brittan: On the last point, I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that the work of people in the special branch and the security service is of crucial importance in this area. It would be an absolute tragedy if what is said in the House or elsewhere were to undermine their morale or their work, which is necessary for the protection of the lives of us all.

In regard to the relationships to which my hon. Friend referred, I think that what he has in mind is the arrangement that I announced last October. The difference essentially between what I have announced today and what I announced last October is that last October we were talking about arrangements of an inter-departmental kind, within Government. Here one is talking about advice and co-ordination of information and techniques for the police service.

Mr. J. D. Concannon (Mansfield): Will the Home Secretary accept that the Opposition have a role to play? Knowing full well the delicacies of the security aspect—this is what my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) was trying to put over—I should like the Home Secretary to reflect upon his decision not to let my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—I say “my right hon. Friend” advisedly—have a full copy of the report, on Privy Council terms. I can assure him that on occasion this has been done in regard to other matters. It is a delicate report, but I do not think anyone has ever been let down when information has been made available on Privy Council terms.

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I shall, of course, reflect on what he has said. There was a precedent for handling the matter as we have done. I assure the right hon. Gentleman—I hope the right hon.

[Mr. Brittan]

Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will accept it as well—that it has not been done in any spirit of ill will or personal doubt.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Does not the report demonstrate the need for greater resources to be made available to the special branch of each police force? Is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied with the co-ordination which exists between 43 different special branches?

Mr. Brittan: These matters are perhaps better considered in another context, but to the extent that they arise they will for these purposes be considered under the new arrangements that I have set out.

Mr. Robert Maclellan (Caithness and Sutherland): While one accepts the need for and appropriateness of establishing a new permanent working group, and the readiness of the Social Democratic party to participate in Sir Lawrence Byford's group, can the Secretary of State ensure, by publishing detailed terms of reference, that a new permanent group will not impinge upon the conduct of national policing policy or move us in any way towards a national police force as a response to this terrorist emergency?

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his indication, as one would expect, of the co-operation of his party with Sir Lawrence Byford's group, which we shall value and which, I am sure, will be of great benefit. I am happy to reinforce what I said in my statement; the new arrangements that I have set in hand are not meant in any way to lean towards the creation of a national police force. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the language, he will see that it has been most carefully chosen to avoid any such implication or trend.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to have regard for the subsequent business. We have a standing order No. 10 application and also a ten-minute Bill, so I shall allow questions on this to go on until 4.30; then we must move on.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the high regard and confidence placed in Mr. Roger Birch, the chief constable of Sussex, are in no way diminished by the contents of the report? Will he confirm that the inclusion of Roger Birch in the group of chief constables is a welcome reflection of this? Will he confirm that the proposed setting up of the group of chief constables in no way reflects a shift in responsibility for the policing of future political conferences from the chief constable of a county to another group?

Mr. Brittan: On the last point, that is certainly the case. The chief constable of Lancashire will have responsibility for the arrangements at Blackpool. I am sure that he will be assisted by the pooling of advice and expertise that the new arrangements will enable to exist and also by the co-operation of political parties in the House in working out arrangements that are desirable for events such as this in a way that would not be done on the basis of any one force area when conferences and other events move from place to place.

In regard to the Sussex police, one of the most striking features of the reaction since October is the absolute unanimity of Members of Parliament from Sussex in expressing their warm and loyal support for the Sussex police force, a support which I know from those who have spoken would not have been readily expressed if it were not a reflection of years of experience of the work of that force.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Will the Home Secretary recognise that, while one is pleased that police forces in Great Britain will benefit from the hard-earned and dearly bought experience of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, terrorism cannot be combated effectively if there is not whole-hearted support for our police forces?

When the Prevention of Terrorism Act is used to combat terrorism, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman ensure that the public are properly informed, notwithstanding the constraints that may exist at any particular time? Will he ensure that the public are informed of the reason and justification for the Act being invoked?

Mr. Brittan: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. It is often difficult to inform the public in specific terms of the exercise of powers that are contained in the Act. I welcome the opportunity once again to give the absolute assurance that I regard the powers as extremely undesirable in principle but sadly necessary in practice and to be exercised only with the greatest possible care by the incumbent of my office. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the country that it is in that sense and spirit that the powers are exercised. They will never be exercised for political purposes, contrary to some of the suggestions which have been bruited in recent months.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I welcome the words that my right hon. and learned Friend has spoken in praise of the Sussex police force. As a Sussex Member, I know of its efficiency and that of the chief constable. However, is he aware that I am deeply disturbed at the lack of understanding that all of us have, and clearly have had, about the standards of security that are necessary and the failure to search, as was required, during the course of the conference? I hope that the working group will not merely be a group of wise people which will say what should be done. I trust that my right hon. and learned Friend will willingly take on the task of ensuring that that which has to be done is enforced.

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. He will recognise that we are talking about something which is dependent on police ability, efficiency and confidence and on the readiness of individuals, organisations and parties to make the necessary changes, which will always be unwelcome. A balance will continue to have to be struck between the level of security and the ordinary workings of democracy. It is a matter of building up support for what is necessary and striking a proper balance, which may be a new one, and not merely that of the Home Secretary enforcing that which is required for security. It is for that reason that I attach the greatest importance to the co-operation of all the political parties in the Byford group, as well as the work of the new working group, in dealing with the other matters to which I have referred.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What will the relationship be between the national reporting centre and the new permanent working group with its responsibility for bringing 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?"

How will the two organisations relate to each other?

Mr. Brittan: There is no connection between one and the other.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Will my right hon. and learned Friend admit that one of the crucial areas of the police intervention at Brighton was when the occupants of the Grand hotel were herded together on the promenade, where we were perfectly easy targets for any second intervention by the IRA? My wife and I were in room 301, two floors above the Prime Minister, so we know the trauma of the events. However, we were all herded together on the promenade for some hours. Should the police be informed that sometimes assassination cannot be prevented if many prominent people are herded together in one place at 1 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock or 5 o'clock in the morning?

Mr. Brittan: I take note of my hon. Friend's point and I am grateful to him for raising it.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Could I raise a different aspect that stems from the Home Secretary's statement? Although the statement relates to the Brighton bomb incident, and therefore Sussex, the consequences are important and there are major proposals which go far wider than Sussex.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the police forces that are responsible for major conference centres throughout Britain have an almost impossible task? New conference centres are being developed at Harrogate and Bournemouth, and the four towns of Harrogate, Bournemouth, Blackpool and Brighton are all holiday resorts. Has he considered the danger of the local authorities that are responsible for letting these centres for major party political conferences telling the political parties that their interference with security during the normal holiday trade is now so great and so intrusive that they will no longer take the party conferences? Are we moving towards a situation in which we might well have to bring the conferences to London, where there is security, rather than take them to what are basically holiday towns?

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to an important aspect but I am not sure that I have come to the conclusion that he has. I can assure him that it is the intention of Sir Lawrence Byford in the course of his work to discuss with representatives of the hotel industry, both generally and perhaps in relation to specific occasions, what they can do to assist. The same will apply to those responsible for the management of conference centres and other places that are used for such purposes. It may be that action can be taken across the board in the course of making general arrangements and not in expectation of a particular conference. Whether that is so and what that action could be are matters which Sir Lawrence will wish to consider with representatives of the hotel industry and those who manage conferences.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I represent a party conference town and I welcome what my right hon.

and learned Friend has said. May I ask him to take the opportunity to clarify the law of treason as it relates to acts of terrorism, such as that which took place in Brighton, which are designed to eliminate a Government? Will those who are found responsible for the evil act at Brighton be subject to the law of treason? Does the law as it stands still carry the death penalty in those circumstances?

Mr. Brittan: The law of treason carries the death penalty but it is for prosecuting authorities and not for the Government to decide whether charges should be brought in a particular case and, if so, what charges should be laid. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General exercises an independent judgment in these matters and it would not be appropriate for me to express a view on what offence has been committed or what charge should be brought in a particular case.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Home Secretary aware that all intrusions into civil liberty are begun by arguments on grounds of security, and that any examination of the proposals, which my right hon. Friends have not been able to see in confidence, are bound to raise in the minds of many some doubts about what is in store? The right hon. and learned Gentleman speaks as if the risk of assassination is especially a matter for party conferences—

Mr. Brittan indicated dissent.

Mr. Benn: Well, the implication was that they bring special security requirements, but any Prime Minister, Minister, Member of Parliament, political leader or anyone else is exposed throughout the country all the time to the risk of attack as he does his job by speaking at public meetings. If the police are now to assume powers as great as those which have been suggested, that could have the effect of separating, on security grounds, those who exercise power or have responsibility from those to whom they are responsible. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will take these matters seriously. Many ideas have been produced in the abstract that have commanded support in the aftermath of an explosion, as with the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and they are seen afterwards to have very different purposes in their actual application.

Mr. Brittan: I agree with a great deal of what the right hon. Gentleman has said. I hope that I made it clear in my statement that I regard the proper balance between security and the exercise of our civil liberties as a precious one that should not lightly be altered. The report and its consideration relate specifically to conferences and comparable events which are comparable in scale. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that security issues arise at events of a lesser scale that are attended by those who may be at risk of assassination. I would not disagree with that. But nothing to which I have referred indicates the slightest readiness to slide over civil liberties, which are as precious to those of us on this side of the House as they are to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): If a large part of the United States Administration were staying in the same hotel, the hotel would be cleared exhaustively beforehand, and everybody would be searched throughout. Is this not the sort of price we have to pay if we want the party conference system to continue?

Mr. Brittan: That is exactly the sort of question we have to face up to.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Very few hon. Members are standing. I will call those who have been standing if they will put their questions very briefly.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Provisional IRA is the enemy of both Irish and British democracy, and there is always the utmost condemnation of terrorism from all parts of the House. In view of the answer which the right hon. and learned Gentleman gave to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths), is the Home Secretary suggesting that parliamentary concern about the special branch when the special branch is not involving itself with terrorism or any other offence is wrong? Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman not take this opportunity to state clearly that we should have a healthy interest in the activities of the special branch and that the present inquiry being conducted by the Select Committee is perfectly all right and justified?

Mr. Brittan: As to the inquiry by the Select Committee, I was not saying that it was all right or was not all right. It is a matter for the Select Committee and not a matter for me. I was merely saying that I thought that unfounded criticisms of the special branch were damaging to morale and were unjustified.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) mentioned four towns, one in Lancashire, one in Yorkshire, one in Sussex and one in Dorset. Will my right hon. and learned Friend take note that Dorset is a small county, with seven Members of Parliament and that therefore the percentage burden of the 1986 Conservative party conference falling upon the Dorset constabulary is probably out of all proportion to that faced by any other county constabulary hitherto? Will he in very good time ensure that adequate funds are made available not just from my constituents but from central funds to enable the job to be done properly?

Mr. Brittan: I take note of what my hon. Friend has said, but I would not like to arouse any financial expectations.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Home Secretary tell the House how many police man hours of the Sussex constabulary, including the special branch, were used in the miners' strike in the weeks and months leading up to the incident at Brighton?

Will he also tell the working group that he is setting up that it is nothing short of hypocrisy for the Government to be talking about trying to get the matters that went wrong in October put right if at the same time the Government of which he is a member are prepared to continue the miners' dispute, will not agree to a settlement and therefore will use more and more police man hours in order to carry that through?

Mr. Brittan: I do not have information as to the number of man hours that the Sussex police force used in the miners' strike.

With regard to the other matters, I think it is extremely unlikely that I would wish to communicate that information to the working group.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): May I express the hope that the informality and free mixing which characterises all party conferences will not be jeopardised as a result of the outcome of the findings of my right hon.

and learned Friend and his colleagues and that under the Prevention of Terrorism Act bodily searches will not be a necessary feature for people who have to enter and leave the party conference?

Mr. Brittan: I appreciate my hon. Friend's views, but it is exactly the contrast between the desire to be spared that kind of experience on the one hand and the desire to ensure adequate security on the other to which my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) gave vent. It is that balance that needs to be worked out, and plainly there is a lot to be done in doing so.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Further to the points raised by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) and my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon), does the report comment on the implications of modern day terrorist methods that make it practically impossible to guarantee the security of prominent people staying together in one place when the location of that place is known so far in advance?

Mr. Brittan: My hon. Friend is certainly right to point out the difficulties, and it is the details of terrorist matters of the kind to which my hon. Friend has alluded that make it inappropriate to publish the report.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and the Border): Will my right hon. and learned Friend be assured by me, as someone who spent all his life in security before entering the House, that I believe that the Hoddinott report is absolutely correct both in its conclusions and in its analysis, in that the level of policing given at the time was adequate in relation to the perceived threat and to the expectations of conference goers? Further, will he disregard the comments of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that the report is inadequate and complacent, because I believe that the right hon. Gentleman is utterly off beam? Finally, would my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that adequate resources are given to the training of police officers, particularly in the provincial forces, to deal with the new terrorist threat that we face because of high technology in terrorist equipment?

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his assurance. I can certainly assure him that the training point will be taken on board.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): In welcoming the report, which seems most helpful, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to take note that we on this side certainly welcome the news that the party conferences will continue to take place? However, my concern remains that we should have the priority of searching not only the premises before the conference delegates attend but also the people each time that they go into the conference. That should be the main concern, and the location of the hotel which is publicised. I wonder whether the report has examined the possibility of locating all senior Ministers or Opposition spokesmen in the same hotel, because this seems to lead us into a difficult situation on which the Northern Ireland police force obviously will be able to advise.

Mr. Brittan: Some of these questions are among the matters that have to be considered by the Byford group and on which the parties themselves will ultimately take a view.