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27 April 1987

Immediate *519629.*

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

*15) Bernard Jenkinson
from Ted [unclear]
5.15 pm
27/4/87*

With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the current security situation.

The House will be aware of the recent serious increase in the number of casualties caused by terrorist actions. In the first week in particular 2 members of the RUC, 1 UDR soldier and 3 civilians have been murdered. The civilian deaths were of the foreman of a building company, and most recently the murder of Lord Justice Gibson and Lady Gibson. In respect of the details of this latest outrage, while I have not yet received the full report on it, I have had an initial discussion with the Deputy Chief Constable and the GOC and will be meeting the Chief Constable and the GOC again later today. However I am giving the House some further information. The explosives were in a blue Cortina car, which had been reported stolen a month ago in S Armagh. At the time of its theft the car had GB number plates. It is believed to have been left only a few minutes earlier at the side of the road between the border crossing point and the security force check point. The method of detonation appears to have been by radio signal. In addition to the two fatalities, there were 9 other people injured.

The question has been rightly raised as to how there could have been any outside knowledge of Sir Maurice and Lady Gibson's movements. The RUC advised me of evidence

that the bookings were made in their own names through a travel agency in Belfast on December 29th, and that on February 12th a change was made to the date of their return. The booking form included the description and registration number of the car. Further detailed investigations are continuing and I will inform the House as appropriate of any further information. I know the whole House will share with me the feelings of horror at this outrage, at the loss of a distinguished and brave member of the NI judiciary and of his wife, and to express our deepest sympathy to their families.

But Mr Speaker while public attention has been focussed on this particular outrage, it would be quite wrong not to express our deep concern equally about the other tragic victims of this most recent and savage burst of terrorist violence. The recent and cowardly attacks on off duty members of the security forces, coupled with murders of policemen in Newcastle and Portrush, and the murder of the civilian prison instructor at Magee College and the use of his body to lure two further members of the RUC to their deaths, and indicative of a renewed desperation and viciousness in the IRA campaign. The security forces will meet the challenge of these new tactics by the IRA with the resolution and courage that have stood them so well in the past, and the Government will give them all possible support in their vital task.

Niall Buzgers

For Bernard Davenport

From Ted Smyth

Attached is statement by Secretary of State King. He took questions for three quarters of an hour. Seamus Mallon was present and said that the two things the IRA fear most are cross-border security cooperation and the weaning of the Nationalists community away from the IRA. One of their aims is to provoke punitive reaction to prevent these objectives being achieved. OUP and DUP MPs were present but Molyneux intervened to say it would be useless to engage in futile exchanges. Implication was that Unionists wanted a debate.

Stuart Bell for Labour was very outright in his support for the Agreement and referred to the two recent finds of explosives in the Republic. In response to questions, King underlined need for Nationalists in the North to give unqualified support to the RUC. Regarding RUC ~~resistance~~ *assistance* to the Garda, he said that a number of suggestions and offers were made and some were accepted. At least three Tory Mps asked questions that were supportive of the Agreement and critical of Unionist boycott. Roy Mason called for tougher measures and there is some speculation in Fleet Street circles that after tonight's security meeting in Stormont Castle such measures will be announced.