

Dermot Nally Papers

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Renewal of the EPA Debate
8 June 1993

1. The Order to renew the Emergency and Prevention of Terrorism Provisions was approved last night by 314 votes to 204. Attached is a Hansard extract of the principal interventions. A full text will follow by bag.
2. The debate was opened by the Secretary of State, accompanied on the front bench by Michael Mates, who summed up for the Government. McNamara was flanked by O'Brien and Stott. There was a good turn out on the NI benches with seven OUP, Paisley and Robinson for the DUP and all the SDLP except McGrady present. Attendance was otherwise typically low with ~~about~~ only about two dozen members present, including Peter Bottomley, Andrew Hunter, David Alton, David Winnick and more unusually, Sir Edward Heath. The Press Gallery was almost deserted with only a handful of journalists putting in a brief appearance for the opening remarks.
3. The highlight of a debate which, for the most part, followed predictable and well rehearsed lines, was the intervention by Sir Edward Heath. In terms of presentation this was a fine speech, delivered without notes and overshadowing all other interventions. We have spoken to a number of contacts in Westminster this morning (9 June) about Heath's remarks, and the following is a summary of how it is being viewed.
4. It is an open secret that the former Prime Minister has been given a very large sum of money to write his memoirs. The existence of this long overdue project is used by Heath as an excuse for his unwillingness to grant interviews or to speak out about his period in office. His speech therefore was all the more surprising for its specific references to the Sunningdale period including his recollection of a call on him by Paisley - a fact hotly disputed by Paisley - "I brand that a lie as I brand the other lies the Rt Hon Gentleman has told the House." While we have as yet to meet anyone who has checked the actual record the feeling is that Heath, who

after all is writing his book, and would have researched this fact for his speech, is probably correct in his recollection and its emergence now will not help Paisley. The sense here is that there is a twofold agenda behind Heath's intervention in yesterday's debate. He has extensive contacts in the City and in the financial sector and also is increasingly looked to by the Tory heartlands as a man who can articulate their deep rooted feelings. His attack on the Government's failure to deal effectively with terrorism will strike a strong responsive chord with both constituencies, in particular his demand that the Prime Minister raise the whole issue of terrorism to a higher level, including the appointment of a senior Cabinet Minister. He is also known to be respected and trusted by the intelligence community and his call for a centralised anti terrorist body may stem from his contacts with senior figures in the intelligence community, particularly MI5. The impact of his intervention remains to be seen. There is a feeling however, that some at least of what he had to say will find favour with the new, right leaning, Home Secretary. Mr Howard has let it be known that he intends to show that the government has taken on board the frustration at conservative grass roots level with the government's apparent ineffectiveness on law and order.

5. His explicit call for the exclusion of Paisley from the talks process could be construed as an indirect signal of Government intentions. There is no one however who believes that Heath's speech was anything more or less than a very forthright and independent statement of his own position. Indeed the feeling is that Mayhew would have found scant comfort in Heath's speech which indicated a belief on Heath's part that the Brooke/Mayhew talks have by now gone well past their sell by date. He also made very clear his belief that "the closest possible relationship with Eire" was an essential part of any solution.
6. Everyone commented on Mayhew's uncharacteristic testiness and short temper during the debate. This is being put down to the difficult period he is going through just now having had to sit through yesterday's Prime Minister's Questions with Michael Mates by his side as the latter's contact with Asil Nadir was given a full airing.
7. McNamara spoke about the Labour Party's proposal for "a more imaginative approach to policing in Northern Ireland". McNamara proposed separating Community and Anti-Terrorist policing and sharing responsibility for the latter with the Republic to the extent of creating a "new form of constable, an Irish constable." He attributed this suggestion to "the member for East Lothian" - John Home Robertson, a member of the Defence Select Committee who made a recent fact-finding visit to Northern Ireland. There was no reaction from the Unionists present to these remarks, all of whom appeared to be reading copies of McNamara's script.
8. Mallon gave a strong hard speech. Hunter, chairman of the Conservative backbench committee on Northern Ireland, said he had never heard him "so strident and intransigent" and he felt that his remarks were "a bleak ill omen for any hope ... of re-starting the constitutional talks".
9. Molyneaux's remarks on the talks followed his recent line; He spoke of the "strait jacket" of the phrase nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed. He accused the NIO of blocking the prospect of modest progressive improvement and destroying, through flawed initiatives, the stability that had been patiently create.