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Minister: Now the whole basis and underlined feature of this exercise is aid to the civil power. This is a law and order nation and a law and order Government and it is the duty of the Armed Forces to assist the Gardaí and provide for them all the services that they need to see that law and order is preserved. These are my instructions and I was sent here about a fortnight ago and I have followed them as diligently as I could but assisted to a superlative degree by everything you see around us, typified by the Chief of Staff in respect of the Army, Capt McKenna in respect of the Naval Force, the Secretary of the Department and those who are not here, namely the Guards - the Garda Force right down through from the top to the bottom. So the statement that we issued at about half-two this morning is correct. To that I would like to add that this craft was under surveillance for twenty-four hours. At least two Irishmen travelled on the Claudia; six have been apprehended. There were 250 rifles on board, by the way that I am saying now, you realise we have been getting telephone messages in the last few minutes so that if there is more on board, this is not all on board but I merely say what I know and give you the full information I have at this moment of time. If there is further information the only reason why you are not getting it is that I have not got it. All right, happy on that! 250 rifles, 240 small arms are definitely on board and a quantity of anti-tank mines and explosives. Now I am informed by the Chief of Staff here that an anti-tank mine is not necessarily something that you use against a tank but it has this feature that relative to its weight and size it has a much higher degree of explosives than would be usual in the sort of explosives that have been used there and in the North of Ireland - it's a very powerful thing. I have told you that they were under surveillance for twenty-four hours, and at that stage gentlemen, I think its over to you.

Reporter: Could you tell us where these arms are from? Are they English or Russian or American?

Minister: No I couldn't tell you at this moment where they are from. I am going to be quite honest with you. When I reach the stage of something I wont tell you, I'll tell you I wont tell you and anything else that I know of I will tell you - right.

Reporter: Did the Irish Authorities get a tip off?

Minister: No Defence Minister in the world will divulge sources of information. You yourselves gentlemen are prepared to go to jail rather than divulge your sources of information and I have no intention whatever of divulging any sources of information.

Reporter: Was the seizure of the vessel part of the major clampdown by the new Government on this sort of operation?

Minister: I dont know - if you could describe the action as a major clampdown or a change of emphasis. The situation was that a duty had to be done and it was diligently carried out by everybody involved. I wasn't Minister for Defence three weeks ago and I hadn't enquired with relation to any activities myself

Reporter: ............ line in future?

Minister: I beg your pardon
Reporter: Are you going to take a stronger line in future?

Minister: I am going to take just as tough a line as was taken on this occasion and on all occasions.

 Reporter: Was there any resistance at the time of the arrest?

Minister: Yes. We would remind you in fact a year ago there was the Kilrush incident which drew a blank when a ship was apprehended and it drew a blank. This one didn’t. The gentleman down there wanted to ask a question.

Reporter: Well was there any resistance, was there any attempt to escape?

Minister: You realise that we have been merely in contact by radio all the time and this is a matter of small short messages. I don’t think so but I wouldn’t like to say that I am certain of that - I don’t think so.

Reporter: Do you know, Minister, has this been the first shipment of this kind?

Minister: I beg your pardon.

Reporter: Have there been other shipments of this kind?

Minister: To my knowledge it’s the first but again I haven’t had time in my short period here to delve into past events. I have been too busy trying to look after the present.

Reporter: Mr Donegan, could you just go through the whole incident for us? Could you just take us through it from the first news you had of it here to the final incident?

Minister: Well, the vessel was under surveillance for at least twenty-four hours. We had a Garda Superintendent and a Customs Officer on board the vessel so that in fact the civil power situation would be preserved in all situations that we could think of. The exercise was then carried out; in fact, Capt McKenna would more properly be able to advise you on the Naval aspects of it and she was apprehended about a half a mile due east of Helvick Head. Boarding was carried out at 23.30 on March 28th. The launch was apprehended, I don’t know, probably very shortly, same time; Capt McKenna says probably same time. There are six persons in custody.

Reporter: Six Irish citizens?

Minister: Yes I could say Irish.

Reporter: Six Irish.

Minister: Yes.

Reporter: How many Naval Vessels were involved in this operation?

Minister: Four, three, three on spot and one.

Reporter: Three minesweepers and one Fishery Protector - the full force of the Irish Navy.

Minister: That’s right – threw the book at them.

Reporter: . . . . . . . . ground element?

Minister: I want to emphasise that there was a ground element and a very efficient ground element involved in this - 1st Motor Sqn and 12th Bn.

Reporter: These were standing by on the shore?

Minister: These were in - Chief of Staff.
Chief of Staff: They were, generally speaking, in situations back to the shoreline available if they were required.

Minister: Yes.

Reporter: Were there any arrests on the shore?

Minister: I think, again of course you realise that this thing is happening very fast. I think it would be proper to say probably not. The only ones I might pick—I might go wrong in telling you—weren’t arrested on shore—might be the people on the launch. I don’t know officially what happened.

Reporter: When .......

Minister: I wouldn’t be able to tell you that. I merely tell you everything I know.

Reporter: Where was the ship when she first came under surveillance?

Minister: Captain.

Capt. McKenna: Oh, the ship when she first came under surveillance was around about the Saltees.

Minister: But she went round and round—I mean we were trying to conjecture what exactly—

Reporter: Obviously, you were expecting this vessel?

Minister: Yes.

Reporter: Do you believe she intended to go to Helvick?

Minister: I believe she was intended to rendezvous.

Reporters: Were the Air Corps involved?

Minister: The Air Corps were standing by.

Minister, you were saying a moment ago that she was going round and round and you were trying to conjecture. At that time did you know what was involved in this or were you in fact conjecturing?

Minister: Oh, no. We weren’t conjecturing on what was involved. We knew what was involved if our information was correct.

Reporter: Was there any link up with the British Security Service?

Minister: That is a question relating to the fact that no Defence Minister in the world would give information on intelligence and I don’t intend to do that.

Reporter: Will the people involved be charged today?

Minister: Will they be charged? I don’t know. I’m going now to Cork in a Helicopter. It’s a matter entirely for the Garda. I am going to Cork now to thank the entire service that was involved. I want to express the sincere thanks and appreciation of the Taoiseach and the Government and myself and indeed I’m sure I speak also for the people here who are with me on the marvellous work and courage and integrity shown by the Army, Naval Service, the Air Corps and the Garda.
Reporter: How many vessels did you have?

Capt McKenna: 4 vessels

Reporter: Could you tell us which vessels you had?

Capt McKenna: Déirdre, Grainne, Fola and Banba

Reporter: These were all in the area when contact was made?

Minister: Yes

Reporter: What about the Army?

Minister: Well I’d like to tell you about the Army. You have got all sorts of things such as radio contact and services that the Army provide. The Army – this could not have been probably done without the Army. The Army, the Navy the Air Corps and the Garda are all involved. The fact that the operation was at sea means that the colourful end was the Navy, but they were all involved. All deserve high praise. I think everybody now knows and all the world will know that this is a law and order state and we intend to have it so and our loyal forces of all kinds and our loyal police force are of the greatest integrity and worthy of the greatest praise.

Reporter: Could Capt McKenna tell us were the Irish Navy personnel armed when they went on board?

Capt McKenna: I can assure they were armed – very much so

Reporter: How many in the boarding party?

Capt McKenna: I just couldn’t tell you the number at the moment

Reporter: Would you say it was comparatively small, though?

Capt McKenna: Well, if you are boarding in fishery protection its about 3 you send aboard but now remember we had four vessels and four threes are twelve – that’s the least anyway

Reporter: Captain, the boarding party came from the Déirdre?

Capt McKenna: Oh, I honestly couldn’t tell you if it came from the Déirdre. I would say it came from all four or bits of all four. Remember the size of the boarding party is relative – that you have the four armed vessels

Reporter: So that in fact this boat was surrounded before they probably realised there was anything happening?

Capt McKenna: I would, I must say subject – I am only going down myself within the next hour and we were only interested in kind of the important particulars, but I would say this is substantially correct.

Minister: We are going down now by helicopter to Cork

Reporter: Were you in fact waiting for her to walk into a trap which she couldn’t get out of?

Capt McKenna: Well, we led her into a trap and we came in after her

Minister: Well, we had her for a long time because of this matter of the contiguous zone which goes out to twelve miles. International law allows us to take steps under certain Articles of the Convention and we were advised by the Secretary of the Department here and by other people in the service what rights we had. We were prepared to use them.

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Reporter: Will there be charges?
Minister: No charges.
Reporter: Do you know the Company the ship belongs to?
Minister: Don't know.
Reporter: Do you know how many of a crew there was?
Minister: Don't know.
Reporter: Where are they now, sir - in prison?
Minister: Oh no, no, no no - I don't know - Captain.
Capt McKenna: No, as far as we know they are aboard the ship at Haulbowline.
Reporter: Were the arms .......
Reporter: Can you tell me Minister why there are no charges against them - There are?
Minister: Well, do you think it is a wise thing or an interesting thing that you have Nationalists from the far side of the globe involved in what is obviously a financial situation. We are not interested in them, we are interested in...

Reporter: No, a situation like that is quite simple. They are just here for the money. They came halfway across the world and we are not interested in them. We are interested in their ship and we want them out of Irish territorial waters and if they put their nose into it again we will chop it off.

Reporter: You say from the far side of the globe and halfway across the world. Does this suggest Russia?
Minister: No.
Reporter: The Middle East?
Minister: No.
Reporter: Gibraltar, 12.30, 21st
Reporter: Where is the ship registered?
REPORTER?
Minister: Cyprus.
Reporter: There has been a suggestion that Cyprus might be a place from which arms might come?
Minister: You can't make that suggestion. I don't know.
Reporter: You don't know where the arms arrived from?
Minister: No, not at the moment.
Reporter: You are suggesting more or less - I could be wrong - that the arms could have come from Gibraltar?
Minister: No, I am suggesting that the boat came through the Straits of Gibraltar. It is a great check point because the distance across, Captain, is what between the African side and the...
Capt McKenna: Less than twenty miles - I couldn't be absolutely certain.

Minister: Less than twenty.

Capt McKenna: Down to ten or twelve - that's a guess.

Minister: It's very short. It's a very short narrow strait - so if people want - if you want a surveillance of stuff going into the Med or coming out of the Med - you'd sit pleasantly at Gibraltar or the far side.

Reporter: Could you tell us .......?

Minister: No.

Reporter: Minister, what tonnage has the ship?

Minister: 296 according to the newspapers.

Reporter: Someone suggested it was 500 and 700 tons?

Minister: All right, ok, well, according to you fellows it was 296.

Reporter: Did you look after the whole operation yourself?

Minister: Not at all, I wouldn't dream of that. The situation is that I was merely there for a good reason, and I'll tell you the good reason. If there was need for the situation of the Minister for Defence and ... how his power is built up within the laws of this State - any situation whereby at any time during this operation there was needed a directive on the strengthening of the armed forces - by giving that directive, I was there to give it. In fact, the previous day I went so far as to take a piece of paper and write every power I could possibly put down on it and sign it and give it to Captain McKenna so that he wasn't carrying the can - I was, because this is a law and order State and it is going to be that.

Reporter: Could you tell us what you were doing before you were called in - were you at a party, or dinner or a function or parliament - whereabouts were you?

Minister: I can't remember, I can't remember - that's really true. As far as I know I was over in my office.

Reporter: Can you tell us how long ago it was that you first heard about this - you personally first heard about this whole business?

Minister: No, because that tends right on to this whole question of intelligence and a question of sources and I will not.

Reporter: Can you tell us when you made contact with the actual vessel I mean was this .......... Did you make contact off the Irish coast?

Minister: Yes.

Reporter: We made contact within the last twenty-four hours off the Irish Coast.

Minister: Were you in radio contact at any stage?

Minister: With her, no no not.

Minister: No.

Reporter: Can you also tell us how many personnel were involved from the Defence Forces ..........

Minister: Well if you take the Naval side there were approximately 140.
Minister: What are the crew numbers of the Claudia?

Reporter: How many were on board the coaster and how many on board the trawler?

Minister: Well, I have a situation there where I - there is a variation on it. I would have said to you last night that it was three on the boat - on the Claudia and three on the launch, but now there seems to be a message that would suggest that it was possibly two on the Claudia and four on the launch.

Reporter: Are these all in custody now?

Minister: Yes.

Reporter: Is Interpol involved in this?

Minister: What?

Reporter: Interpol.

Minister: I beg your pardon.

Reporter: Is Interpol involved in this?

Minister: That's related to the same question that you don't get an answer for.

Reporter: Has an International implication been declared?

Minister: What? Sorry about that.

Reporter: International implications - it's not about an Irish boat that was seized?

Minister: There are no International implications. The international situation in simply this that we were in territorial waters half a mile east of Helvick Head. Even if we had been outside the three mile limit but within a twelve mile limit this has nothing to do with fishery protection at all. We would have been in what is known as a contiguous zone and this contiguous zone was the subject of an agreement on International Law which Ireland entered into. We could in fact have operated right out to twelve miles on the basis of a contiguous zone. In fact for some time before the boarding was carried out and there was no chance for this vessel except it would be apprehended. We knew that we had them in the trap because his best was 9 knots, the minesweepers do 14, the Deirdre does 18. He was surrounded.

Reporter: Was the Claudia a coaster or a trawler? It has been reported variously as being a coaster and trawler.

Minister: A coaster, a coaster.

Reporter: Had she any other cargo on board besides ......

Minister: That I couldn't tell you.
Reporter: How long do you anticipate you will retain this vessel?

Minister: Just as long — until we get this stuff off her and give her the boot.

Reporter: And will you be questioning the Captain and crew before the vessel leaves?

Minister: That's a matter for the civil power.

Reporter: Will you be going on board her today?

Minister: I don't know.

Reporter: Minister, did your predecessor know about this particular shipment

Minister: I don't know anything about my predecessor. I think he is a very decent man. I'm quite certain he did a lot here before I arrived from... I have seen and certain other things I have seen since I came here. I don't know anything about this. You could ask him if you want but I...

Reporter: Does this mean you are going to step up boarder patrols now?

Minister: I beg your pardon.

Reporter: Does this mean you are going to step up patrols?

Minister: Oh, I don't know what will happen in the future. That's a matter for these people here. I'm merely the cog in the wheel that has to make sure that it's not a square cog — a square peg in a round hole.

Reporter: Have you any definite information, Minister, about the movements of the ship before passing through Gibraltar. Did it call to any ports in North Africa?

Minister: No, not at this moment. I think it's quite honest to say that I quite honestly could not tell you.

Reporter: Did it call to Tunnis?

Minister: Well, there are all sorts of things. Somebody else suggested that it called into Ca... I don't... we don't know. It's... none, none.

Reporter: The fact is you don't know where she was before she vanished or you are not saying?

Minister: No, I don't know, don't know... just the plain way of saying it. That doesn't mean the parts I mightn't know.

Reporter: Are the six persons detained — are they all men?

Minister: Yes, yes, I would love to produce a good story for certain newspapers, but...

Reporter: You must be feeling very pleased about the whole thing, Minister?

Minister: Well, I'm not pleased at all, I'm sad about the whole thing — very sad about it that this should occur and that the necessity for what we have done should arise and any such matters of punishment that should arise. This is nothing but a matter of sadness to me but what must be really exemplified is that in my considered opinion, 99% of the citizens of this State want law and order and are backed by their Government and I think also if I was to coin the British phrase — the loyal opposition — and that we are going to see that they get it and that this in what the world can now say and what British people can
Minister (contd)

now know that in fact the Irish people are not the sort of people that some writers might perhaps say they were and that we are a good democratic modern State bent on law and order and the stopping of violence and the taking of life.

Reporter

So what will happen to the IRA now then, Minister?

Minister

Well I don't know but you know the course on which the Government has been set since its election and - from there out the question of efficient things should be ......

Reporter

When was the Taoiseach informed?

Minister

The Taoiseach knew all about everything at all times

Reporter

When did he first know, sir, could you tell us?

Minister

It's entirely related to the same answer as you have got in relation to the first time we first knew

Reporter

Minister ........... would you mind, as far as you can, giving us the route of this vessel again?

Minister

Well the easy way to do that or rather the sensible way to do it is to give you the information that was given me namely that she came through the Straits of Gibraltar at something around midday on the 21st

Reporter

On the 21st?

Minister

Yes, she then vanished and there are all sorts of talks about where she called and didn't call. We don't know. Maybe ordinary shipping sources would be able to get you that information. Maybe they have got you. Maybe that's why those talks about various places are mentioned

Reporter

So, from the time she was last seen on the Straits she then turned up here?

Minister

That's right. She then turned up here and she was under surveillance.

Reporter

Does that mean she is registered in Holland?

Minister

No, she is not registered in Holland. She is registered in Cyprus, but on the radio I have heard that she was owned in Holland.

I don't know if that's right or not.

Reporter

Tell me was there any cooperation with ......

Minister

No, I couldn't possibly in any way inform you of anything like that and you won't catch me no matter how hard you try. That is a matter for Intelligence and I am not nineteen years in politics for you fellows to catch me.

Reporter

You said the ship was first noticed at the Saltee Islands - was she actually seen by the Irish - by the Navy

Capt McKenna

Yes

Reporter

Did you know in advance the Irish destination of this vessel?

Minister

Well, it's entirely related again to the matter of Security and Intelligence
Reporter: Do you know Minister who was bringing these arms in?

Minister: Not at all. I mean at this stage the situation is that six Irish citizens are apprehended, are in custody and there I leave you – you have got to think of the Garda.

Reporter: You said there were two or three people aboard the coaster arrested. Were there other people on board also?

Minister: Of course the crew; oh yes indeed yes.

Reporter: Where were they from - Cypriots?

Minister: I dont know

Reporter: Any indication where ......

Minister: Well the best indication I can give you is that she came through Gibraltar at twelve – at noon or thereabouts on the 21st.

Reporter: Not quite sure

Minister: Not quite, something like that now - 21st yes

Reporter: Have the Irish Government alerted Interpol now and traced them back?

Minister: Thats related again to the question that I wont answer.

Reporter: Mr. Donegan, the leaders of the IRA have indicated that they have been getting things like rocket launchers through Southern Irish ports and across the Border into the North. This cant possibly be the only shipment of arms thats come through into the Republic?

Minister: That is an expression of opinion by you on which I will not comment.

Reporter: When you mentioned Irish citizens is there an indication that these are people from the North or?

Minister: There is no indication whatever at this moment in time

Reporter: Where are they being held at the moment - in Cork?

Minister: I cant exactly say. They may be in custody, in transit or they may be in Cork.

Reporter: Is the Claudia en route to Cork at the moment?

Minister: She is there, she is there

Reporter: Haulbowline or in Cork itself?

Minister: Haulbowline

Reporter: Yes thats right yes

Reporter: Where was the trawler involved owned?

Minister: Pardon

Reporter: Where was the trawler owned?
It's not a trawler, it's a launch.

We think it was belonging to - at least it was used in sea angling - one of the sea angling launches used in Dunbarvan - we are not quite certain. It's not - it wasn't a fishing vessel as such.

To explain to you how this thing could have been done. They were doing it on a rising tide, and therefore if this launch were to be used and I don't commit myself at all on whether it was or was not - for this is a matter entirely for the Guards - if it were to be used to convey arms or bombs or anything else to the shore this launch would only draw possibly a foot and a half to two feet - draw water a foot and half to two feet.

Therefore, it would have been quite easy for men to wade out and carry goods ashore on a beach using this launch, and of course they would have had a few hours of tide and if the launch went aground it would constantly be rising; there is no question of it sitting down and they not getting it off again on a rising tide.

Was the Claudia ever in Ireland before - have you established?

I haven't the foggiest notion.

... Can you give us an idea of the arms and explosives that have been seized?

Yes, this is now minimum. We don't know what more is on but we can say to you that there were - there are 250 rifles, 240 small arms and a quantity of anti-tank mines and explosives and I'll describe to you this anti-tank mine what it means - it's a very high explosive relative to its size. The Chief of Staff advises me that an anti-tank mine has a higher quality explosive altogether relative to its size. You could convey a smaller amount of it to a point and do more damage.

Not against mines - not against tanks.

What sort of rifles?

I don't know at this moment. I'm being utterly honest with you.

Does the quantity mentioned earlier - 5 tons - still stand?

That's the quantity that came through on the radio as the estimate of our people when they boarded her.

How many were in the boarding party?

Well, Capt McKenna could only conjecture.

Well, I'm afraid I couldn't tell you the exact number - I don't know.

What's the normal number of a boarding party?

It's not something we do normally. We board a fishery protection vessel alright and there are three, normally three, of us.

What is happening the Capt and crew of the Claudia now in Haulbowline? Will they be questioned? Will they be charged?

I'll tell you now what will happen precisely. The Claudia will get a boot in the transom and will be put out of our waters fast.
Reporter: When you say you got her into a trap then did she go somewhere she didn't intend originally to go?

Minister: Well, that's another matter related entirely to Intelligence and Security.

Reporter: You said earlier ....

Minister: You are getting a very fair break, you are being told absolutely everything I know except anything that involves one that and I can't - you fellows will go to jail for your sources. I don't have to do it but I don't have to tell you either.

Reporter: Will you be giving further information later in the day?

Minister: Well I'm going to. I'll be at your service at any time that you wish me to be. I am going to Cork now with the Chief of Staff, Capt. McKenna, Comdt. Savino and the Press Officer and who else..... That's it?

Minister: Yes, that's it and I don't know I mean I'll give you all I can give you and stay within my proper behaviour. Well, I promise you that I have given you everything and indeed if you want me at the station when I come back here I'll meet you again and give you everything that is within my proper behaviour, but I'll stay within my proper behaviour.

Reporter: Could we arrange a press conference with you now when you come back from Cork.

Minister: Well this is it - when do we expect to be back.

Chief of Staff: .... Justice

Minister: Yes, I would think. The Chief of Staff says Justice, because they would be the right people, I don't know - I haven't had communication with my colleague on the Cabinet at all because this is. But you realise this has been an all night operation - I had a shave and a shower this morning.

Chief of Staff: Yes I think that that is a good idea from the Chief of Staff. The Press Officer, you see, Comdt. Savino is there and we can amplify anything we have or wish for you through Comdt. Savino.

Reporter: How will we be able to contact him then?

Minister: He is flying down and he is flying back. Comdt. how would you feel like contacting the Press.

Comdt. Savino: .........

Minister: Yes, and what time when you say afternoon now. We mightn't be back maybe until 3 o'clock or something like that but a ....

Reporter: We would like to talk to you personally again, Minister if we can. That's what it comes down to.

Minister: That's quite all right.

Reporter: 5 o'clock shall we say Sir?

Minister: 5 o'clock here.

Minister: Well if it suits your newspaper schedule that's all right - all right.

Reporter: Minister, will you show the BBC outside where the is

Minister: OK.
Tom McCaughran asked the Minister how the arrest came to be made.

Minister - Well I mustn't tell you anything that would involve intelligence or security of any kind. We had this boat under surveillance since yesterday and we apprehended her in Irish territorial waters about a half a mile east of Havrick Head. We could in fact act up to 12 mile out under an International Convention which refers to contiguous waters and we had the law with us right up to 12 miles out. She was only a half a mile out when we took her.

Can you tell me what type of arms she was carrying?

Minister - Certainly. There were 240 Rifles, 250 small arms and a quantity of anti mine - anti tank mines, now I don't know what anti tank mines are, but I am told by the Chief of Staff that they are a very high explosive material. What it really means if you want to blow up something you can blow up, you can do more damage with a smaller quantity and from that point of view its a very very powerful explosive.

What type of Rifles were they?

I don't know, you see we are only on Radio Call, you see I am up all night you see and we are getting the Radio Information coming in.

Do you know the Country of origin of the arms?

No I don't that Country, no.

Well do you think that these arms were destined for the IRA?

I have no opinions on that except that certainly they were not being brought in here to shoot ducks and we will leave it at that. As far as the origin is concerned, we know that this boat came through the Straits of Gibralter on the 21st around midday. Then she vanished and she arrived.

Were other Security Forces and perhaps other Navies involved in this operation?

That has to do with Intelligence and Security and I won't tell you. You will go to jail before you will reveal your sources of information - I won't tell you.

Does this operation represent a tougher line with subversive organisations?

Well I have only been here three weeks and I don't know where you start or finish on what is a tough line. As far as I am concerned, this is a law and order Government, this is a law and order State, this is democracy and we are going to be a good modern democracy that will do our job. Ninety-nine per cent of the people in this Country want law and order and we are going to give it to them.

Do you think that there may have been other shipments?

I have no views on that at all or any knowledge.

Was this known before hand, was this a trap for this particular boat?

I wouldn't think that you could describe anything like that as a trap. It's quite obvious that we were waiting for the boat and we acted properly. We had the security of the State in our hands and we had to act as we did.