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HCS/6/49

cc. PS/Ministers (B&L) - M
PS/PUS (B&L) - M
Mr Brennan - M
Mr Stephens
NI Perm Secs
Mr Spence
Mr Innes
Mr Gilliland
Mr Chesterton - M
Miss Elliott - M
Mr Blackwell
Mr Baxter
Mr Sullivan
Mr Hammond, Home Office - M

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - M

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY : IMPLICATIONS OF CLOSURE

1. Mr Sonnenberg's note of 18 June requested urgent advice on car parking for members of the Assembly after dissolution and access to the Stormont Estate by the press. This minute reports on these and some other matters.

Car Parking

2. The Clerk has notified Members that they will be allowed to leave their cars in the Assembly car park whilst clearing their rooms in the week immediately following dissolution. Members and party employees' security passes and car park stickers will however cease to have validity one week from the date of dissolution and are to be returned to the Assembly. Once these passes have ceased to be valid security guards will refuse entrance to the Assembly car park.

Access to Stormont Estate

3. Under the Stormont Estate Regulations the road from Massey Avenue to Parliament Buildings and certain specified areas are open to the public during

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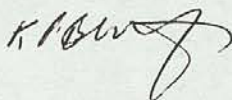
set hours and this area of the estate has traditionally been regarded, and used by the general public, as a public park. The Regulations also provide that persons and vehicles may enter and leave the estate at reasonable hours, provided pedestrians and drivers have business at any of the buildings.

4. We cannot therefore deny entrance to pedestrians via the Massey Avenue entrance, although some areas such as Stormont Castle and Stormont House are out of bounds. Persons attempting to enter by car are asked for a security pass and without this entry would normally be denied, unless they claimed to have legitimate business at a building on the estate. There is nothing in the Regulations which could be used to prevent the press covering events in the estate although they can, of course, be kept out of those areas which are out of bounds. The steps of Parliament Buildings are not out of bounds and our legal adviser is extremely doubtful if the Regulations would allow us to declare them out of bounds to the public. He considers that this could be going beyond the power in regulations which are designed primarily to regulate entry to a public park. Such a step would not in any case prevent interviews elsewhere in public areas.
5. The Regulations forbid any unauthorised assembly of persons and unauthorised public address, but it is doubtful if this could be used to prevent the press carrying out interviews. The police are unlikely to regard such action as amounting to unauthorised assembly and action on these grounds is likely to be counter-productive. The Regulations also permit the estate to be closed at any time without prior notice but this would create problems in relation to access by civil servants and would be difficult, to enforce even if adequate manpower was available.
6. While therefore the press have no right of access to the Estate as such we cannot deny them entrance to the public areas nor prevent them carrying out interviews there.
7. John Kennedy, Clerk to the Assembly, spoke to me on the telephone this morning. He reported that the Speaker had been received at the Palace yesterday by equerries, following contact between the Speaker and the Whips' Office.

CONFIDENTIAL

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8. The Assembly adjourned this morning having sat until 2.37 am. It now appears that it will not meet today (one consequence of which is that the Ball to be held this evening may, with luck, be trouble-free). It is, however, likely, to sit again at 9.00 am on Monday next to debate a motion in the terms "the Assembly still says no". The probability therefore is that the Assembly will still be in session at the time of dissolution.
9. Mr Kennedy characterised the atmosphere yesterday as a mixture of "end of term" feeling and acute paranoia. Rumours that, for example, the Senate Chamber is to be converted into a venue for Anglo-Irish Conferences are current.
10. It is becoming increasingly likely that Unionist Assemblymen will seek to continue to meet somewhere as a body after dissolution, probably at the Belfast City Hall.



K P BLOOMFIELD

20 June 1986

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