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ANNEX B

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TRANSCRIPT - CHIEF CONSTABLE SIR HUGH ANNESLEY
SPOTLIGHT PROGRAMME - THURSDAY 27 MAY 1993

The Chief Constable Sir Hugh Annesley delivered his Annual Report in Belfast this morning. As ever the security situation dominated the problems brought into sharp focus by the recent IRA bombs that have laid waste the streets of Belfast, Portadown and Magherafelt.

Looking back on the year as a whole, Sir Hugh pointed out that for the first time since 1976 the loyalists had in fact murdered more often than republicans. He was also at pains to emphasise that over the past 5 years more than 2,000 terrorists had been convicted and sentenced. However, the Chief Constable believes that that figure would be considerably greater if the law was changed. The Chief Constable is urging these changes:

The removal of the suspect's right to silence
The admissibility of accomplice evidence in court; and the
acceptance of intelligence evidence such as telephone taps.

That these proposals don't go far enough for Unionists but are an anathema to Nationalists points up the politics of policing the Province. But first, I put it to Sir Hugh that the recent spate of bombs made it appear to some that the terrorists still had the run of the place.

Sir Hugh Annesley

The terrorists do not have the run of the place; they most certainly do not. We are interrupting, and it will be cold comfort to those who have been bereaved of course or whose premises have been damaged, but we are interrupting the vast number of terrorist attacks. If you take the period of the last 9 months in Belfast alone we interrupted some 20 bombing attacks and we seized over 16,000 lbs of explosives. Now operating within the rule of law and operating within a situation where there is a gulf between the two major communities in Northern Ireland, the RUC cannot alone provide a solution. There must be a political solution in the end. What

the RUC can do, and is doing, is to provide a high level of stability so that any talks process can take place in a civilised and reasonable and productive manner.

Interviewer

Well I take your point about interception and we only have your word for the fact that you do intercept so many more bombs than actually go off. But when you look at the destruction in Magherafelt, in Portadown, in Glengall Street and the remains of the Opera House, you cannot call that success?

Sir Hugh Annesley

You cannot measure success or failure in isolated incidents. Let's just remember, when we're talking about those towns, let's just remember before people are looking elsewhere who is to blame. The Provisional IRA is to blame for this, not the RUC, not the Army, not politicians. Nobody in my Force nor I have ever said that we had any panacea to law enforcement. All I can say, and I think it is more than just my word, because the evidence is there every day in front of the media, that the majority, the vast majority of attacks are being prevented. Now I cannot, nor will I give, any indication to the general public of Northern Ireland that there will not be another one. What I can say is the vast majority will be interrupted but it lies outside my remit and that of the Army to produce a final solution.

Interviewer

Well take Glengall Street for instance, there was the day after the local elections, a time when I presume the Force was on high alert because it's considered to be a tense time. You have a street which has the Unionist HQ in it, the Opera House, the prestige entertainment spot in Northern Ireland, the Europa Hotel, probably the most famous hotel in Northern Ireland, and still it seems the IRA have been coming with its scout cars and look-outs and its tactics to get round you and plant a bomb there and this is the second time in the same spot?

Sir Hugh Annesley

There are dozens of targets within Northern Ireland and certainly they are not all restricted to Belfast. The IRA did bring in a bomb on this occasion. It was found very quickly. A technical officer was attempting to defuse it when it went off. There is no preventive measure in the world in a democracy that could be introduced to prevent and secure every single street, every single hour of the day, and anybody who says there is in our democratic situation is a fool.

Interviewer

What you're saying is probably more of the same. Four tons of fertiliser appear to be in terrorists' hands at the moment. This is the basis of these explosives so we can look forward to more explosions of this nature.

Sir Hugh Annesley

I think it's pejorative to put it in that way. We are looking to more of the same in terms of our successes, our arrests, our defusions, our convictions, but yet it is possible that there will be some more bombs and there will be some more assassinations. The overwhelming bulk have been and will continue to be prevented.

Interviewer

Take something like fertiliser for instance - so much of it available, so much left lying around and yet as we know this is the basis for the bomb. Can we not change the law governing the sale of fertiliser or how it's kept, simple things like that to make it more difficult for the terrorists?

Sir Hugh Annesley

It sounds logical in the way that you put it. It really isn't as simple as that. A very large number of people in the farming community, both in Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland, need fertiliser. It will be very difficult to turn round and say that anybody found with fertiliser was committing an offence. It isn't fertiliser per se that creates a bomb. It's part of that mixture

with other ingredients. What I can say to you is that an examination of whether that could be prevented is certainly not new and there is an on-going examination into the explosive content of certain types of fertiliser which would not impede its effectiveness within the farming community.

Interviewer

Looking at the year as a whole, you pointed out that the loyalists did kill more people than the republicans. Does this mean essentially the RUC is facing a war on two fronts?

Sir Hugh Annesley

Well the RUC is facing a war by terrorists and the primary terrorists are of course the Provisional IRA in the lead followed by the loyalists. The loyalists have indulged last year in some outrageous atrocities and their attrition rate, as they would see it, is now higher than the republicans. What it certainly has meant is that we are having to spend a very great deal of time in areas where there is a high threat such as North Belfast. Our own officers are coming under fire from loyalist which did not generally happen in the past and that is a worrying trait. What I can say is that it doesn't matter to us whether it's loyalists, or whether it's republicans. People who go round and shoot and bomb will be arrested and interrupted irrespective of which community they come from.

Interviewer

What about this phrase that's now banded about by the loyalists - the Pan Nationalist threat and the implied threat there to constitutional politicians, say within the SDLP. Is this a serious escalation?

Sir Hugh Annesley

Well, I think any threat in today's times has got to be taken seriously. The major threat is of course to Sinn Fein politicians and we have seen that tragically in the past. There is a general threat although my view is that it is of a lesser nature against

established Nationalist politicians. But it exists. We have warned them about this and given what advice we have, and I hope it will not go beyond that. But I think that any politician operating in the unsettled atmosphere of Northern Ireland faces a residual risk, irrespective of which party they're in.

Interviewer

Now last Monday you had a meeting with the Secretary of State and he said that he relies on you as his chief adviser on security matters. Now did you take the opportunity to bring up nitty-gritty points with him. You mentioned in your Conference that you wanted changes in the law such as the right to silence and there is other points like that. Did you take that opportunity then to say 'Look, Secretary of State, I need these tools if I'm going to do the job'?

Sir Hugh Annesley

Well I didn't need to go into that at that stage. We had a wide discussion on security and what had taken place and that must, of course, remain confidential. But I had given some months ago a presentation to the Secretary of State and to his most senior officials about the changes that I believe are necessary. Now whether they will be accepted eventually is of course a matter for Government this is a democracy. I believe they're necessary. I put them forward and they are now the subject of a Committee chaired at very, very high level on which the RUC is represented.

Interviewer

Are you prepared to get cross about it. You said they are essential and not desirable and without them you can't do your job?

Sir Hugh Annesley

I think getting cross and banging the table is highly unproductive. I will continue to push them because I think they're necessary, but I'm a Police Chief. I don't make the law. It's the Government who makes the law on behalf of the people. I will put forward operationally, practically and pragmatically what I think is essential.

Interviewer

Well take the right to silence. Say I was sitting here. I am suspected. I stay completely silent. I refuse to speak. Now if this new law regarding silence is brought in, it would become an offence to remain silent, is that right?

Sir Hugh Annesley

In certain circumstances, yes.

Interviewer

What sort of weight would that carry. It would be a very minor offence I imagine, merely to refuse to speak?

Sir Hugh Annesley

I think you put a superficial vein on this which isn't accurate. What we're talking about here is a system whereby the law in Northern Ireland is heavily loaded in favour of the terrorist. There are a wide number of terrorists walking the streets who ought to be in jail. They operate outside the law, we operate inside the law and because of that when they are accused they pray in aid and operate every successful and potential caveat of the law that will operate on their behalf. Now what I'm saying is the lean of that should be changed. If you are sitting here and I am asking about your income tax you must answer, the same with VAT, the same with Customs and Excise, the same with fraud. Why should the more serious atrocities have a lesser priority.

Interviewer

Some people would say that given the terrorists' ability to manipulate the law, internment really would be the sort of serious weapon that the police need to deal with the current situation. What's your answer to that?

Sir Hugh Annesley

Internment, as I have said before, is a matter for the Secretary of State and the Government. It remains on the Statute Book and it may be there are circumstances in which the Secretary of State and the British Parliament would decide that it ought to be introduced. In advance of that clearly my confidential view would be given, but that's for the Government. This is for me to recommend. I do not think these changes are tinkering. The ability to keep silent is the crucial issue that allows terrorists to frustrate the criminal process in Northern Ireland and they do so again and again and again, and the losers in this are not the issues of civil liberties. The losers are the ordinary people in this Province who have been bombed and murdered.

Interviewer

Do you think internment's too draconian a measure to do this?

Sir Hugh Annesley

I'm saying internment is a matter for the Government.

Interviewer

Some of those more hawkish elements in the community, Chief Constable, wonder about your commitment when it comes to beating terrorism, especially when you make remarks about there's a limit to what we can do and it's a political solution that's going to really tackle the problem. We're holding the line almost. Given those facts, I could be sitting here this time next year talking to you about your 1993 Report and the situation, from what I can gather from what you say, would be very much the same. Would you agree with that?

Sir Hugh Annesley

If I get the law that I'm looking for I think this will be different, but it is not for me to defend myself against hawkish elements. If they have got any better suggestions, let's have

them. People are apt to talk and to make complaints and to make statements that are practically impossible. I have no lack of commitment. The results speak for themselves and day in and day out with my senior colleagues I concentrate on the prospect of making more inroads into the Provisional IRA and the loyalists and I will continue to do so, but I would be both a liar and a fool if I was to pretend that solving this problem lies within the auspices of the RUC. It has been going on for 23 years; I have been here for four and if anybody can pull a rabbit out of a hat, it is not me.