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15 OCT 1980 2



Minister of State:

SECURITY AT THE RVH

DUNDONALD HOUSE
UPPER NEWTOWNARDS ROAD
BELFAST
BT4 3SF

MA 15/10 discussion in B fast next week

1. You should be aware of recent developments affecting security at the Royal Victoria Hospital.
2. Over the past fortnight there has been a combination of events,^{about} some of which you may already be aware.
 - 2.1 The Eastern Health and Social Services Board had drawn up proposals to reduce the level of overt security on the site aimed at achieving a financial saving of some £200,000 per annum without significantly reducing the overall level of security. The proposals would have involved a re-deployment of security personnel, leading to the removal of security guards from the gates and instituting instead spot checks within the site. Internal security at the RVH apparently costs the Board some £700,000 per annum. At a time when the Board has to find substantial savings, affecting inter alia staffing levels in other areas of its work, much store had been placed on the security proposals. Continuous efforts had been made to arrange a meeting with the Trade Unions to explain these proposals and eventually a date had been agreed on 7 October.
 - 2.2 Before this meeting with the Unions could take place, an ambulanceman who had been a police reservist was shot dead by the PIRA in the Broadway Ambulance Depot on 30 September. On the next day a threat was telephoned to the same depot ostensibly from the PIRA indicating that any ambulanceman with security forces connections would be treated as a legitimate target. About one-third of the ambulancemen in the depot are police reservists. As a result the ambulancemen requested a meeting with Board officers and this took place on Saturday, 4 October.

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- 2.3 The meeting with the ambulancemen was held in an emotional atmosphere and, although the Board offered any of the men a transfer to another depot or a period of paid leave, the ambulancemen insisted that action must be taken immediately to improve security at the Broadway Depot. There was an inference from the meeting that if urgent measures were not taken to protect the Broadway Depot then the ambulancemen would consider industrial action. The Board representatives said that they would consider a list of measures put forward by the men for protecting the depot and a follow-up meeting was promised within a fortnight.
- 2.4 As a result of these events, the Board's officers requested a meeting with representatives from government and the security forces to weigh up the latest situation. This discussion was held on 10 October and a copy of the minutes is attached. The RUC offered to assist the Board in evaluating the need for further security measures at the Broadway Depot. It became fairly clear from this meeting that the Board's officers did not have the full support of their own Board in their desire to reduce security costs at the RVH. Indeed at least one Board member (a member of the DUP) is pressing for more effective security. It was left however that, once the joint evaluation had been made of the ambulancemen's proposals, the Board would write to the Department indicating exactly what measures they now proposed to pursue.
3. The Eastern Board has been caught in a dilemma whereby on the one hand it wishes to reduce its financial commitment to security at the RVH while on the other hand it cannot ignore the public reaction to any apparent reduction in security following the shooting of an ambulanceman. While it is for the Board to decide as part of its management responsibilities whether to increase or reduce internal security, it cannot ignore public and potential political reaction if it opts for financial savings. It is likely that the Board will

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write to the Department indicating that it had hoped to save some £200,000 per annum on security costs at the RVH but in the light of recent events this has not been possible, bearing in mind the likelihood of an ambulancemen's strike. The Board may look to the Department for financial help in finding the potential savings in security staff costs this year.

4. We now await the written submission from the Board to see exactly what action they propose. You may wish however to discuss the position in anticipation of the Board's submission and, if so, Mr Copeland and/or I should be available.

R F MILLS

14 October 1980

cc Mr Copeland

Mr. Davenport (W10)

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