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NORTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

County Hall, 182 Galgorm Road, Ballymena, Co. Antrim BT42 1HN

Telephone: Ballymena 3333

Chief Officer: R.A. Hamilton, B.A., M.Ed., Dip.Ed.

Mr E G Martin,
Department of Education,
Rathgael House,
Balloo Road,
BANGOR,
Co Down,
BT19 2PR.

Our reference

Your reference

Date 10 April 1986



Dear Mr Martin,

I have been asked by the Chief Officer to prepare a report on the events that led up to and occurred during the adjourned meeting of the Board which was held on Tuesday, 8 April 1986. I was asked by Mr Hamilton to forward a copy to the Department. A copy is enclosed.

I have sent a copy home to Mr Hamilton and have forwarded a copy to the Board's Vice Chairman who was in the chair at the meeting for most of the period.

If your Department has any further questions on the matter I would be happy to answer them if at all possible.

Yours sincerely,

D R McCUNE
Senior Education Officer (Administration)

Att.

DRMcC/EW

Report on the events that occurred leading up to and during the 165th Meeting
of the Board held on Tuesday, 8 April, 1986.

At approximately 9.45 a.m. while reviewing the planned agenda for the Board Meeting scheduled for 10.30 a.m. with the Board's Vice-Chairman and the Personnel Officer, Mrs. Fryers, we noted that a number of persons had gathered near to the entrance path to the County Hall and were obviously preparing to picket or protest to the Members of the Board then arriving or due to arrive for the meeting.

In accordance with previously made arrangements I telephoned the RUC at Ballymena and informed them of the situation. The police arrived within a few minutes.

I asked Mrs. Fryers to advise the security staff at the lower ground floor of the situation and to ask them to prohibit entry by members of the public to the Council Chamber until the commencement of the meeting at 10.30 a.m.

The crowd having grown to around 40-50 persons congregated at the lower ground entrance to the County Hall and subjected arriving members, depending on their perception of the members support or antipathy to the crowds point of view, to verbal abuse and cheering. They carried various colours, union flags, etc. and posters and placards depicting their opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Many arriving members were accosted concerning their continued attendance at meetings of the Board and accused of various "disloyal acts" by permitting the Board to function. Members were subjected to pushing and shoving as they gained entrance. The Police presence facilitated entrance.

At 10.30 a.m. the members gathered in the Council Chamber together with various officers and the normal small number of reporters.

A number of members of the public estimated at around 50 persons entered the room and congregated around the two exit doors, and along the rear and sides of the Chamber behind the seats occupied by members and officers. They were accompanied by a number of Press Photographers and at least one Television Cameraman.

The members of the public were for the most part carrying a range of placards, colours and posters. These included Union Flags, Placards bearing the legend "Ulster says No". Posters depicting a Ballot Box crushed by a jackboot overprinted with the words "Anglo-Irish Agreement" and handwritten sheets carrying the names of Members of the Board with the additional words Collaborator, Traitor etc. e.g. Collaborator Rev. Terence Frederick Callan.

Those members of the public recognised by me or latterly identified to me were Mr. J. Allister, M.P.A., Rev. W. McCrea, M.P., M.P.A., Rev. I. Foster, D. Calvert, G. Campbell. Other members and officers recognised further demonstrators. The group appeared to include persons from across the Province and was not representative of solely the Boards area alone. Those identified would appear to be associated with the Democratic Unionist Party.

Mr. J.R. Beggs, M.P. the Chairman invited the members of the public to be seated in the row of seats at the back of the room and in the public gallery. This was declined and they remained as outlined above.

The meeting commenced and the Board dealt with a few preliminary items of business, noted the resignation of Mr. MacAfee, (a member) agreed to send its wishes to Mr. Hamilton for an early return to duty from illness, made certain arrangements concerning his absence and agreed to write to an officer whose home had been petrol bombed last week. The roll call of members was taken and showed that 31 members were present. While the earlier business had been dealt with in relative silence from the crowd albeit in the somewhat intimidating atmosphere, the roll call produced cat-calls and jibes at each name, e.g. Traitor, Quisling, Collaborator etc.

Mr. Beggs gained the Board's adoption of the Minutes of its March meeting and signed them.

Mr. Robinson proposed, seconded by Mr. Maternaghan, that the Board should adjourn and that a recorded vote on the matter should be taken. Eleven members indicated by standing in their place that this should be done.

Upon a vote being taken eleven members voted in favour of the proposal to adjourn, sixteen members voted against with four members abstaining from voting. At this point, as the Chairman announced the decision, the demonstrators started jeering at the members. The Chairman announced that he and the other members who had supported the resolution would withdraw from the meeting.

Following the withdrawal of the Chairman, Rev. R.F.S. Poots, the Board's Vice-Chairman, took over the chairmanship and attempted to continue with the declared business of the Board.

Concurrent with the departure of the eleven members, the members of the public invaded the well of the Council Chamber and the Chairman's Bench waving their placards and shouting Traitor, Collaborator, Lundy, Quisling etc. at the members remaining. Rev. I. Foster wrote on a blackboard, which was in the room the words "Shame on the Protestants in this Board". Mr. Allister took over the seat vacated by the Chairman.

Rev. Poots adjourned the Board meeting for fifteen minutes.

Mr. Allister announced that he would chair a meeting and called on a number of his colleagues to speak. These included Rev. McCrea, Mr. G. Campbell. These persons expressed their view that by continuing to carry out their duties, the remaining members were "Yes Men", "Supporters of the Agreement", "Motivated by Personal Gain" and in the case of the Protestant clergy were operating contrary to the view held by ALL of their respective congregations. In this latter regard Rev. Poots, Rev. S. Graham and Canon Fair were individually so accused.

Rev. Foster indicated that in the eyes of the protestors and by implication the generality of the population those members who remained were traitors.

Throughout this tirade, the speakers were accompanied by choruses of jeers, cheers, name calling, brandishing of flags and placards and "singing" of songs such as "Derry's Walls", "We shall not be Moved" and "We'll Meet Again".

Rev. Poots called on the protestors to leave having made their demonstration,

this was rejected, Mr. Allister saying they would leave only when the members left. A demonstrator was heard to call out "We'll carry them out bodily one by one". Rev. Poots further adjourned the Board meeting.

Mr. Allister read from a list of those members who had voted against the adjournment of the Board and of those who had abstained from voting. With each name a chorus of abuse was directed to the individual member with words Traitor, Lundy, Shame etc. being used. The phrases "Tell us where he lives" and "We know where he lives" were heard. The paper from which Mr. Allister read the list was seen to contain photographs of the members (it having been prepared from one of the Board's own publications).

During the adjournment the views of members on the continuation of the meeting were sought by Rev. Poots and the opinion of the RUC was sought as to their perception of the situation.

Having regard to the advice from the RUC as to the possible consequences of the Police clearing the Council Chamber to enable business to be conducted and to the possibility of conflict, violence, injury to members, officers and police and damage to the fabric of the building and to other considerations Rev Poots rose to adjourn the meeting to another time. This decision was greeted with cheers of victory by the demonstrators and other triumphal acts. Mr. Allister declared that the demonstrators would return for each and every meeting of the Board that would be held.

The members and officers left the Council Chamber, some members being jostled as they did so.

The protestors remained in the Council Chamber for some minutes after the departure of the members and then left the building accompanied by the police.

D.R. McCune
Senior Education Officer (Administration)

9 April 1986