British parliamentarians furious at pro Tamil Tiger demonstrations in London city

Wednesday, 13 May 2009
Last Updated Wednesday, 13 May 2009

By: Janaka Alahapperuma from London "Our Capital city has been brought to a standstill by a bunch of demonstrators who have, in effect, occupied Parliament Square" Hon MP for Aldershot, Mr Gerald Howarth angrily told at the House of Commons debate in British Parliament on 11th May 2009. Mr Howarth was supported by many other British Parliamentarians including the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rt. Hon Michael Martin.
Speaker MP Martin said: "demonstrating is part of a democracy, but no one has ever expected a demonstration to hijack Parliament square and the roads, and thereby stop others performing their democratic duties". He also promised the House to provide more information regarding this matter, later in the week. Police said: "These demonstrators have taken the British Law into their own hands". Tamil Tigers are considered as a banned terrorist group by the UK government. However Police further said that they have noticed red flags being flown at the protests bearing the symbol of the Tamil Tigers. This would clearly indicate to British public that the banned terrorist organization is the main force behind these illegal demonstrations. Even though they deny any link with Tamil Tigers, protesters chanted their support for the Tamil Tigers at each and every protest. At the parliament debate, Rt Hon Michael Martin, MP Speaker of the House of Commons, MP Gerald Howarth and Conservative MPs Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) and Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) spoke against the illegal demonstrations which paralyzed the London City. Meanwhile, Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) and Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes (North Southwark and Bermondsey) supported the pro Tamil Tiger demonstrators. The Hansard Report of the Debate is as follows. House of Commons Debates - 11 May 2009 11 May 2009: Column 550 Speaker's Statement I move on. Does the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Gerald Howarth) now wish to raise a point of order? Mr. Gerald Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yet again, our capital city has been brought to a standstill by a bunch of demonstrators who have, in effect, occupied Parliament square for about six weeks. I have raised the matter with you before. Although it is true that Members have had access, albeit not to the main entrance of the House-we have had restricted access-there are nevertheless hundreds of thousands of people out there going about their business, who have had their business lives and their personal lives disrupted by the demonstration, at enormous cost to them and their businesses, as well as inconvenience. I know that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner has had added to his list of things to do that which you asked him over the weekend to do, but I have raised the matter with you before. It is surely unacceptable that these people should be allowed to take over Parliament square and disrupt the entire centre of our capital city. I wonder what on earth the Metropolitan Police Commissioner is doing about it, bearing in mind that every police officer to whom I have spoken has made it clear to me that it is his view that the Commissioner will take no action, because after the G20 they are completely frit of doing anything for fear of ending up in court themselves. Several hon. Members rose – 11 May 2009: Column 551 Mr. Speaker: If hon. Members allow me to answer, perhaps they will not need to make their points. I have a great deal of sympathy with the case that the hon. Gentleman makes. Perhaps later on this week I will make a statement after I have brought people into the House to try to resolve the matter. Many of us were involved in demonstrations before we came into the House, because demonstrating is part of a democracy, but we would have those demonstrations and then leave. No one has ever expected a demonstration to hijack Parliament square and the roads, and thereby stop others performing their democratic duties. I will be able to give the hon. Gentleman more information later in the week. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased by what you have just said, but will you assure us that demonstrations and the right to demonstrate will not be impeded? Could we all not have some sympathy for the Tamil people out there who are desperate to do something to achieve safety for their families back home? Can we not recognise, at a human level, that people want their voice to be heard and for this House and our Government to do what they can to bring about a ceasefire in Sri Lanka? Mr. Speaker: I can understand that people have issues on which they wish to be heard, but to hijack an important part of this city-with hunger strikers, tents and food stalls, but no toilet facilities-is not the proper way to conduct a demonstration. I will say something further on the situation later this week. Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. When you have your discussions later this week, will you please discuss with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner the advisability of bringing in an implement that would be used in virtually every other capital city-the water cannon? Mr. Speaker: We have enough problems without water cannons; we do not need water cannons. Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your advice, because I was personally involved in Parliament square this morning? I was coming in by car and I was almost at Chancellor's Gate when the Tamil demonstrators 11 May 2009: Column 552 burst out of Parliament square and occupied the road. I was delayed in attending a meeting in the House. Indeed, I was held up for an hour and 10 minutes, until the police were able to sort out the traffic. Is it not the case that Members of Parliament and those associated with the House should have unimpeded access, and the police and the authorities should seek to guarantee that? Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. Gentleman to wait until I have further information later this week. Simon Hughes (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not condone people going on to the streets, but I wish to place it on record that I know for a certain fact that the demonstration in the square was applied for lawfully and granted permission for at least the last four weeks, and it will be able to continue lawfully for some weeks to come. I hope that colleagues will understand that there are laws, passed by this House, governing these matters, and the applicants for the demonstration have complied with those laws. Mr. Speaker: I know that I might be in a bit of a bad mood today, but let me say that when authorisation is given for 50 people to demonstrate, it means 50 people. It does not mean tents or food stalls, or texts being sent to supporters to tell them to bring little children along. That is not part of the authorisation of the demonstration. As a former trade union officer, I know that when somebody co-operates with the authorities to obtain permission for a demonstration, they comply with the rules that they lay down. No one can say that that happened in this

case. Let me add a further thing, because it relates to what Sir Nicholas has said. People, including me, who have had to drive around the square, have been put into a dangerous situation-the roads have been blocked off, because police officers have had to put their vans in the filter lane. So when anyone tells me that permission was given, I say that it was given for a limited number of people, not a mob. Several hon. Members rose – Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we must move on. We have got something called the main business, and we had better get that dealt with. Courtesy: defence.lk