

SUBJECT

CONFIDENTIAL

cc DOE  
NO  
LCO  
H17

TMP



Cabinet office  
MOD

cc Master Set

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

13 July 1981

Dear Colin

As you know, the Home Secretary telephoned the Prime Minister twice on Saturday morning, 11 July. He reported on his visits to Manchester and Liverpool. He said that the riots on Moss Side had been quite different from those in Liverpool. They had taken the form of looting and hooliganism, rather than confrontation with the police. Relations between the local authority and the Chief Constable were now good, as were relations between the Moss Side community and the police. On the first night of troubles in Moss Side, the community leaders had told the police that they could handle the situation. The police had been asked to keep out of the area. This had been a complete failure, and the community leaders had admitted as much to the Chief Constable. The next night the police had saturated the area, and there had been relatively little trouble. This showed the need for decisiveness on the part of the police. The protective helmets provided by the Ministry of Defence had been a tremendous help, and had improved police morale.

The Home Secretary said that there was now widespread anxiety in London about civil unrest. Shops, and other properties, were being boarded up across the city. It was essential to get across the message that the police had the situation under control. The Commissioner was confident that the police could handle the situation. It was not confrontation with the police that was the problem, it was the effect on the retail and tourist trades of looting and hooliganism that were most serious. The police had received much help from ethnic community leaders, but there was little that these leaders could do to control the situation.

The Home Secretary and the Prime Minister agreed that some positive measures should be taken which could be announced in the debate on Thursday, if not before. The top priorities, which the Home Secretary undertook to discuss with the Lord Chancellor, the Attorney General and Sir David McNee, were:

- (a) to ensure that the police had sufficiently flexible powers of arrest, and that offenders were brought to early trial before the Crown Courts. Emergency legislation could not be ruled out. The use of army camps to hold offenders on remand should be considered, given the overcrowding of the prisons;
- (b) to ensure that the police had the necessary equipment available. The police should be enabled to threaten the use of water cannon, for instance, even if it was unlikely to be used in practice. The Home Secretary described the action already in hand on this.

CONFIDENTIAL

/The Police

278

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

The police were being given a demonstration of water cannon this week. The Ministry of Defence had already made available protective helmets. The possibility of acquiring supplies of baton rounds for the police in the U.K. should be considered. The use of troops could not be contemplated: if necessary, the police should be properly equipped, and even armed, before such a step was taken. (You will by now have seen my record of the Prime Minister's discussions with Sir David McNee of the types of equipment that the police considered necessary.)

The Home Secretary said that in addition he would obtain a breakdown of those arrested, including information on whether or not they were employed. Some of those involved in the riots were young juveniles, and special powers might be needed to deal with these offenders. The Home Secretary and the Prime Minister did not rule out the possibility of including provisions on this in any emergency legislation that was introduced.

In his second call, the Home Secretary reported a conversation that he had had with Sir David McNee. Sir David confirmed that the riots had changed in character: they now took the form of looting and hooliganism, rather than confrontation with the police. The "hit and run" tactics of the rioters meant that arrests became more difficult. The Commissioner intended to saturate the Metropolitan area with police that night. Every Commander was under instructions to give full reports of every incident and their causes. Morale in the Metropolitan Force was good, and had been helped by the issue of protective helmets and fire extinguishers. Injuries to the police were now much lower than in the earlier riots, partly because of the change in tactics. This message should be got across to the press. The Commissioner would be going to Southall to investigate the incidents on Friday night. The Home Secretary said that he would be holding a press conference to put across the true facts since the media had been putting out a lot of inaccurate information. The Prime Minister then said that she would like to call in on New Scotland Yard, to see how operations were handled, and to go out and see the handling of the riots on the ground, perhaps in Brixton. The Home Secretary welcomed the idea of a visit to Scotland Yard, but advised against a tour of the riot area on security grounds. I have recorded the main points arising out of the Prime Minister's visit to New Scotland Yard and Brixton separately.

At 1800 hours on Saturday evening, the Solicitor General telephoned the Prime Minister to report on his visit to Toxteth. He had spent 12 hours with the local police, and had toured the Toxteth "triangle". He reported that there had been considerable damage to property. But the cause had not been inner city deprivation; the Toxteth housing estates were of high quality; resentment that the immigrant communities had been given such quality housing was perhaps partly to blame. Morale in the local police was high, and had been helped by the provision of new equipment. The Solicitor General had told the police that they had the full support of the Government, and had conveyed to them the Prime Minister's personal thanks. The Solicitor General confirmed that the main riot on Sunday night, 5 July, had been a confrontation with the police,

CONFIDENTIAL /whereas

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

whereas the riots on the following night had taken the form of looting. There has been no demonstrations against the police since then, and relations between the coloured community and the police were good. There was some evidence that political agitators had been present during the riots. The area was now relatively quiet, and the clearing up operation was making good progress.

The Solicitor General then reported that the Chief Constable favoured the introduction of powers of arrest on the lines of those in the Riot Act. These would be triggered by an announcement of a state of riot by the Chief Constable accompanied by a magistrate, or if necessary by the Chief Constable acting on his own. The area in question could then be cordoned off, which would ensure that those trying to enter the area after the declaration of the state of riot were not arrested. The Prime Minister said that if such powers were to be introduced, quick legislation would be needed: there was a strong case for action before the Royal Wedding.

I am copying this to David Edmonds (Department of the Environment), Jim Nursaw (Law Officers' Department), Michael Collon (Lord Chancellor's Office), & John Wiggins (HM Treasury).

yaws

Wilkie Rickett

C.J. Walters, Esq.,  
Home Office.

CONFIDENTIAL