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10 DOWNING STREET

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THE PRIME MINISTER

18 October, 1979.

Dear Tony,

Thank you for your letter of 13 October about the Provisional Sinn Fein Press Conference held in Dublin after the Pope's visit. I did not see the broadcast myself, but I gather that the meeting was an open one attended by members of the Press and at which the local police were also present, and that the Sinn Fein representatives were subjected to some very searching questions. The Provisional Sinn Fein is the political wing of the Provisional Republican movement and is not proscribed in the Irish Republic nor, I should add, in Northern Ireland or Great Britain. I understand that during the Press Conference, when pressed by reporters for statements which would have implicated them directly in the illegal actions of the Provisional IRA, the spokesmen refused to answer, pointing out that those were matters for the Provisional IRA.

I am also told that the BBC's decision to include an item about the Conference in the news on 2 October was taken after very serious consideration and having full regard to their guidelines. The Home Secretary does not consider in all the circumstances that it would be right for him to consider issuing a direction to the broadcasting authorities in the matter.

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As far as the authorities in the Irish Republic are concerned they, like ourselves, would undoubtedly like to be able to prefer charges against the leaders of the Provisional IRA, but we are both fighting terrorism within the law. To bring them to trial, evidence is needed that will convince the court. Nevertheless I believe that the Press Conference showed the total sterility of their philosophy of violence and their confusion in the face of some blunt questioning. No one who saw the Press Conference could feel anything but contempt.

Yours ever,

(SGD) MT

Tony Marlow, Esq., M.P.