

Prime Minister



10 DOWNING STREET

I think this is worth  
reading.

  
7/7/81

CONSERVATIVE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

PETER SHIPLEY

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MEMORANDUM

PS/ST-R

Alan Howarth

To

From

Peter Shipley

6.7.81

Riots in Liverpool and Southall

I attach a note which I prepared yesterday, before last night's even more serious break-down of law and order in Liverpool and the use of CS gas.

I am sure what the public will expect now is a new Public Order Act this week, together with the speed-up of the provision of protective equipment for Police Forces. Clearly as the 'Times' points out there are differences between the two riots - Southall began as inter-racial gang warfare; the Liverpool rioting seems more like Bristol and Brixton. I mentioned to the Home Secretary in March this year that provincial Police Forces were not geared to dealing with major incidents, and in the light of what happened in Liverpool I think we must ask of what became of the Home Office Review of co-operation between provincial Police Forces (known as Mutual Aid) that was carried out after the Bristol incident.

If the Police Force do not obtain the proper backing and equipment at the present time then it will mean that at some future stage the Army will have to be deployed.

cc. The Chairman  
Sir Harry Boyne  
John Hoskyns ✓  
Tony Greenland  
David Nicholson  
Nick True

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The weekend's violence in Southall and Liverpool marks a further deterioration in public order. The situation has been getting rapidly and significantly worse since the Brixton riots in April and the latest events conform to a pattern; it is not simply a matter of isolated incidents.

Recent developments bode ill for every responsible body: the government's commitment to uphold law and order look pretty thin, the police find themselves in the middle of a dangerous and difficult situation for which they are neither trained nor equipped, and community relation leaders find their efforts undermined as gangs of youths, white and black appear to be taking the law into their own hands.

The catalogue of events since Brixton is alarming. Serious disorders have occurred in several parts of London - Finsbury Park and Peckham in particular, with lesser incidents (i.e. clashes between black and police without serious injury, looting or arson) in Ealing, Wanstead, Wandsworth, Lewisham, Brixton, Islington and Notting Hill. A white youth was murdered by a black mob in Thornton Heath in June, and a black man was killed by a white gang on the same night as the Peckham riots.

Outside London there have been at least two Asians murdered in Coventry where numerous clashes involving Asians, skinheads and the police have taken place. Incidents have also occurred in Manchester, Leeds, Gravesend and elsewhere.

The situation is likely to develop in a number of ways:

1. - continuing incidents up to the scale of Finsbury and Peckham and an almost perpetual state of tension in some areas seem inevitable. The operations of the Metropolitan Police seem to take this for granted.
2. - further serious violence (Brixton or Liverpool level) are a distinct possibility in several parts of London or some other large cities at any time, this summer and autumn.
3. - an 'escalation' from what has been seen hitherto in one of the following ways:
  - a) serious disorder in two neighbouring areas at the same time (e.g. Brixton and Lewisham). I doubt whether the police would cope.
  - b) extensive concentrated rioting which turned a particular location into a no-go area for several days.
  - c) more sophisticated weaponry and organisation by rioters, including use of firearms.
  - d) a more extensive white backlash, which would be both political (e.g. demands for armed police, corporal and capital punishment, repatriation of immigrants etc) and physical (e.g. vigilante patrols and gang warfare.)

It is my view that the government must soon act to take the situation in hand. It is no use hiding behind reviews and enquiries and the argument that operational decisions are a matter for the chief constables of the separate forces. Unless the Home Office shows firm and responsible leadership, then extremists of left and right will step into the vacuum and our own supporters will have another cause for alarm and disillusion.

Action is needed on three levels:

- i) legal changes to fill the gap left by Roy Jenkins' repeal of the Riot Act. The present Public Order Act (the review of which began in May 1980 and is now under suspension pending the outcome of the Scarman enquiry) dealt only with marches and provisions; it now needs to encompass assemblies and meetings of all sorts. The Home Office has so many assorted enquiries at the present, the danger is that they will be overtaken by events or that they will all be waiting for each other, with the result that nothing happens until it is too late. On the basis of present progress we will not have a new Public Order Act until 1982.
- ii) making available the necessary resources to ensure that the police are adequately prepared for riotous situations. The Southall riot again demonstrated some of the problems:
- lack of proper protective equipment (too few riot shields, inadequate helmets and clothing).
  - slow response time: it was over an hour before reinforcements arrived, despite the existence of a Central London Reserve, formed after Brixton. Part of the problem last Friday may have been that the police were providing ambulance cover because of a strike. Also since Brixton, additional units, including the SFG maintain a permanent presence in south London and available reserves from west and north London may have been allocated there. Outside London it is much more difficult for police forces, even with the existing "Mutual Aid" arrangements of reinforcements from neighbouring forces, to gather the larger concentrations that are required for this type of operation.
  - poor intelligence - the police, perhaps deliberately were sent to the wrong place. But in several cases where "spontaneous" rioting involving young blacks has occurred, there seems to have been a certain lack of awareness about the explosiveness of a situation. This can partly be overcome by "community policing" but it seems to me that the debate on community versus reactive policing is a false one. Both are needed. Police forces should through the former know the people and the area they are responsible for, but breakdowns in law and order cannot always be averted by a friendly bobby wagging his finger.
- iii) a political initiative, involving community relations organisations, ethnic minority groups, Education and Employment officials. Some further urgent steps may be needed to ease the youth unemployment problem and to find ways of "re-integrating" alienated young people into society. But this should not be used as another excuse for bureaucratic procrastination by the Home Office.

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6/6/81