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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE
LONDON SW1H 9AT

3 SEP 1981

Dear Mike

LIVERPOOL RIOTS

I understand from John Halliday, who is at present on leave, that the Prime Minister requested information on riots in Liverpool earlier this century. I attach a brief note, prepared in the Home Office.

Yours sincerely
Alan Walters
C. J. WALTERS

Mike Pattison, Esq.

LIVERPOOL RIOTS

Liverpool has suffered from a number of waves of rioting this century, with a variety of causes. The major disturbances prior to the Second World War were as follows:

- i) 1909. This had its roots in the latent hostility existing between parts of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities in the city. This came to a head when it was rumoured, wrongly, that a Catholic procession would involve the carrying of the Host through the streets; this would have been in contravention of provisions of the Catholic Emancipation Act 1829. Counter-meetings and demonstrations were organised by various Orange Lodges and other extreme Protestant factions under the leadership of a Pastor George Wise. The resulting disorder in June 1909 involved considerable injury and property damage. An inquiry was set up by the Home Secretary into the conduct of the police (Wise, who had many supporters on the City Council, complained of the Head Constable's anti-Protestant bias and of police brutality towards Protestants), and the causes of the disturbances. The report cleared the police, and declared the main causes of the riots to have been mutual intolerance, misunderstandings on the part of the Roman Catholic community and the demagoguery of Pastor Wise and his colleagues;
- ii) 1919. There were two separate series of riots in 1919. The first, in May and June, was racially inspired, taking place mainly in the dock areas between whites, including a number of Scandinavian seamen, and members of a variety of non-white races, including West Africans, West Indians, Malays and Arabs. The numbers involved were relatively small, but the riots themselves so violent (involving two murders) that, for their own protection, 700 West Indians and West Africans had to be confined in the main Bridewell. The causes seem to have been partly economic; the West Indians and other had been brought over to fill the jobs vacated by conscripts during the War, particularly as sailors and dockworkers. Demobilisation led to a considerable labour surplus, and a large measure of resentment against those considered by ex-servicemen to be responsible for it. The other main cause was simply racial tension: the attached press cuttings, relating primarily to the Cardiff riots, give the flavour of this.

The second series of riots, in August 1919, was prompted by a strike of Liverpool police, and again ex-servicemen were in the forefront. These were larger scale, and resulted more in looting than in violence.

iii) 1931. In September 1931 there were mass demonstrations of the unemployed, designed, according to Liverpool's Assistant Chief Constable, "to intimidate the Public Assistance Committee" into granting increases in the dole. But although thousands of people were involved, there was no serious injury and only minor damage.

iv) 1938. The disorder in Liverpool in 1938 was, as with that of 1909, religious in origin; but it was on a relatively minor scale.

It is thus clearly true that Liverpool has a history of public disorder. But there are two important qualifications to be made to this simple statement. First, the riots (some of which do not truly merit the name) varied widely in severity, numbers and type of people involved, degree of violence and property damage and underlying and immediate causes. Second, Liverpool was no more subject to public disorder than a number of other places. The disorder arising from Fascist meetings in the East End in the 1930s was far more severe than anything suffered in Liverpool in that decade. The disorder during the 1919 police strike was matched by riots of unemployed young people in many parts of London. And the 1919 racial riots were among a number of such in several British seaports, and were surpassed in severity by those in Cardiff, a city suffering similar problems, in which ^{several} people were killed; see the attached press cuttings.

HOME OFFICE
17 JUN 19
RECEIVED

Daily Express,

14th June 1919

LICENSED RIOT.

National self-respect is wounded severely by the continuance of black v. white riots in South Wales. A sorry business has been allowed to go on for days, and lives have been lost on each side, while the Government has neglected the stern repressive measures which were obviously needed. The first necessity is that these insane riots—in which men whom we brought over to fight for us are killed for a race prejudice excited by the folly of certain women—should be stopped. The next is that a campaign of education should reveal to white women the well-founded horror in which their intimacy with blacks is held. This is no less necessary because feeling thus aroused has been intensified by the conviction that black men were getting jobs that should have been reserved for demobilised soldiers. We have to put down a tyrannous persecution of races which enjoy the liberties of the flag of our Empire. We have also to remove the causes of inevitable offence.

W. S. H.

Sunday Express.

15th June 1919.

STOP THESE RACE RIOTS!

Mob-law is no law. A vengeful, infuriated mob is one of the most terrible things on earth, because a mass of excited human beings will be so swayed by the ruthless mob spirit that they will be collectively capable of committing excesses that would never be dreamt of by the individual. The race riots at Cardiff and Liverpool cannot be condoned or excused by any thinking citizen. It is naturally offensive to us that coloured men should consort with even the lowest of white women. Racial antipathy is always present, the sex jealousy inflames it to a violent, unreasoning wave of emotion. To add to the resentment, it is suggested that the black men are holding white men's jobs. These things account for the riots, but do not excuse them. There has been a sacrifice of life and property, shameful things have been done, and there has been an hysterical attempt to establish the worst excesses of lynch law. The balance of blackguardism has been transferred from the coloured element to the white mob, and it is time that firm action is taken against any unruly rioter who attempts to provoke a breach of the peace.