

Prime Minister.

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As expected.

JWH

24 ix.

21 September
1979.

Dear Clive,

Perhaps I should have followed my immediate instinct in my talk with the Prime Minister yesterday and reacted more negatively. For, having thought over very carefully what she proposed, I have to say 'No'. However, I feel I must make a reasoned reply to such an important proposition.

As I expected, my wife's reaction was firmly opposed. This is not the sole factor for me, but is obviously of the highest importance. Not least because she is rather older than I; I have dragged her round the world to some extremely unpleasant places for 30 years; and she has pinned so much on the prospect of living in her own country again.

Then there is the practical fact that I am committed in so many ways to moving to South Africa at the end of next month that it would now be impossibly difficult to put things into reverse. I have sold this house - with possession on 1 November; I have arranged a mass of documentation which only remains valid for a limited period; I have put financial transfers in hand; I have a commitment to join Dunlop South Africa which virtually amounts to a contract and which might well not be flexible. All this, again, might not be the decisive factor on its own.

It is above all on the nature of the task - and my fitness for it - that I have reflected. I am sure I shall not be suspected of being scared of

the personal threat involved; though that is a real consideration for my wife. The prospect that the assignment might last only six months is not much consolation for her given the risk that I might not survive it!

It really is a question of substance. The need is very clear, and was cogently put to me in all respects by the Prime Minister. I myself made the analogy with the kind of thing we had to do in Malaya under Sir Robert Thompson. The very real difficulty I see is that I have no experience whatever of either Ireland or Malayan-type counter-insurgency. I accept what the Prime Minister said about the impact of personality and ability to inject a sense of purpose. But I have the greatest doubt whether that alone would suffice to do the trick in a situation in which the two parties who would have to work with me would be liable to regard me as seriously inadequate on either or both the other counts. I would be totally dependent on them for the facts, let alone advice, and while I might succeed in establishing the former to my satisfaction, and forming valid judgements on the latter, ~~and~~ I am extremely sceptical of my ability to do so, and consequently to deliver any effective results, within the sort of timescale the Prime Minister has in mind.

There is the further problem that I might be seriously misled, or that there could be wide and irreconcilable differences in approach between the other two parties. In a colonial-type situation such as existed in Malaya, it was presumably both

X So, I suspect, would the media!

politically and legally possible to cut Gordian knots in fairly arbitrary fashion; but on my limited knowledge of the Irish situation it seems both actually and potentially far less clear-cut. For example, if it appeared desirable to go to something of a 'martial law' situation, would this not scupper the prospect of the kind of cooperation we so badly need from the authorities in the Republic, and would we not run into unmanageable political problems, both domestically and in the European and other human rights fields? Not to mention the Americans.

I realise that it is not really for me to make an assessment of these complications - which underlines my point about my incompetence in Irish affairs - but although I have never been conspicuously reluctant in the past to 'have a go', I have to form a view not only of my own limitations, but also of the 'doability' of what I am asked to 'have a go' at. So, all in all, and without neglecting what I do not regard it as old-fashioned to refer to as the 'call of duty', I arrive at the conclusion that, if the task is 'doable' at all, it is not 'doable' by me. And it must surely be a matter of supreme importance to the Prime Minister to have somebody with demonstrable confidence.

I realise that she will inevitably be disappointed by this response from somebody in whom she has shown such striking confidence herself. I am deeply conscious of that, and the more sorry that I should have to come to this conclusion. I would only add that I have reached it on my own, and without seeking, or being offered, advice from anybody else.

Yours ever,
John Hinch
(J.E. KILLICK)