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Prime Minister

SECRET AND PERSONAL

PM

Ref. A 02177

PRIME MINISTER

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At a meeting after Cabinet tomorrow you are to discuss the succession to Sir Maurice Oldfield.

2. Since the Chief of the General Staff and others at the Ministry of Defence have been pursuing an idea that Sir Maurice Oldfield might continue in Northern Ireland for a further period on a part time basis, you will wish to say that, when he was appointed, you envisaged that it was for a term of about six months; that he has been there rather longer than that; that he has succeeded in putting the co-ordination of security on a sound and durable footing; and that you are clear that the strain of the job upon him and his own ill health are such that it would not be right to ask him to continue beyond next month. You could add, for good measure, that you doubt whether he would want to do so, even if invited.

3. The two front runners to succeed him are Sir Arthur Hockaday (54), Second Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, and Sir Brooks Richards (61), the Intelligence Co-ordinator at the Cabinet Office since his retirement from the Diplomatic Service in 1978.

4. Sir Arthur Hockaday has much going for him. His career has been spent wholly in the Ministry of Defence, and he is well known to and respected by the military. He is an energetic and effective manager with a somewhat abrasive manner. If the need had been to set up a new system, he would have been very much the better choice. He remains the first choice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. The Defence Secretary is, however, very reluctant to part with him: he relies heavily on Sir Arthur Hockaday in the management of the Department. Sir Ian Bancroft has also said that he thinks that, if Sir Arthur Hockaday were taken out of the Ministry of Defence, even if only for a year, he would have a difficult "re-entry" problem. He would be on any short list of successors to Sir Frank Cooper (who is due to retire in December 1982); and his chances might be adversely affected by a move. I understand that there would be no family complications about his serving in Northern Ireland.



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5. Sir Brooks Richards's experience has not been confined to the Diplomatic Service. He is familiar with the intelligence scene from his time as Secretary to the Joint Intelligence Committee from 1965 to 1969. He has less of a "cutting edge" than Sir Arthur Hockaday; but he is a competent and well liked man, who would certainly be able to maintain in good order the system now firmly established by Sir Maurice Oldfield. The Generals would be less satisfied with him than with Sir Arthur Hockaday, but would I believe find him perfectly easy to work with. He would bring qualities of outside experience and judgment to the job in very much the same way (though of rather a different kind) as Sir Maurice Oldfield himself. There would be no re-entry problem, since he has already retired from the Diplomatic Service. He is not due to leave the Cabinet Office until next year, and if he were chosen I should have to find a replacement as Intelligence Co-ordinator; but I certainly would not want to let that stand in his way, if he were chosen for the Northern Ireland job and willing to do it. He is the preferred choice of the Secretary of State for Defence (who does not want to lose Sir Arthur Hockaday) and of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

6. I know that the view of Sir Maurice Oldfield himself is that he does not need to be replaced: that he has established the new system on a secure footing, and that it will go along perfectly well without him. I think that that may well be right as a matter of fact, but I do not see how politically we can do otherwise than replace him: if there was a need for somebody last October, it is hardly possible to argue that the security situation has so improved that there is no longer a need for somebody now. This does suggest, however, that we are not looking for somebody to change the system but to keep the newly established Oldfield system going. For this purpose (as I have already suggested) Sir Brooks Richards would be perfectly good: perhaps even better than Sir Arthur Hockaday, who is undoubtedly much needed at the Ministry of Defence. If the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland expresses a decided preference for Sir Brooks Richards, I think that you can perfectly well go along with that.



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7. Neither man has been told that he is being considered for this appointment, and we do not know if either of them would accept it. I believe that Sir Brooks Richards's children are all grown up. I doubt whether he would want to spend seven days a week in Northern Ireland, as Sir Maurice Oldfield did at first; but I do not think that he would need to do so.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

14th May, 1980