



9 Ireland

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

15 May 1980

Dear John,

SUCCESSOR TO SIR MAURICE OLDFIELD

The Prime Minister discussed the question of a successor to Sir Maurice Oldfield as Security Coordinator in Northern Ireland after Cabinet this morning with the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Frank Cooper and Mr. Stowe were also present.

1. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that Sir Maurice Oldfield's health was becoming increasingly a matter for concern and he should be replaced as soon as possible. He had done an excellent job in setting up arrangements for coordination between the security forces in Northern Ireland and he had won the complete confidence of the Army and RUC. The system he had introduced now had to be carried forward and would have to be adapted as and when circumstances changed, as they quite certainly would. There was therefore a clear requirement for someone of suitable standing to take Sir Maurice Oldfield's place. There was, however, no need to appoint the new man for more than 12 months in the first instance. Moreover, because the arrangements introduced by Sir Maurice Oldfield were now well established and running smoothly, it would not be necessary for his replacement to devote quite so much time and energy to the job as Sir Maurice Oldfield had done. One possibility might be to appoint someone who would both act as Security Coordinator and fill the Deputy Secretary post in the NIO in Belfast. Another was to choose someone who had either just retired or would be retiring in about a year's time.

3. The Secretary of State for Defence said that he agreed about the need to continue with the post of Security Coordinator. We had invested Sir Maurice Oldfield's appointment with considerable significance and it would be misunderstood in Northern Ireland if he were not replaced.

4. The Prime Minister said that she agreed that Sir Maurice Oldfield's post should be continued, though it might be desirable to ask his replacement to go to Northern Ireland for only six months in the

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first instance. She had reservations, however, about the suggestion that the post might be combined with the Deputy Secretary post in the NIO. This might lower the status of the job in a way which could undermine its effectiveness. It was important that the post should be filled by someone of the necessary personal standing and that would in turn need to be reflected by the rank of the post.

5. The meeting then discussed candidates to succeed Sir Maurice Oldfield. It was agreed that the best replacement, if he were prepared to take the job, would be Sir Antony Duff. The best alternative was probably Sir Brooks Richards. Another good candidate would be Sir Alan Campbell, who was until recently HM Ambassador in Rome. Sir John Paul, Lieutenant Governor of the Isle of Man, was also worth considering, although it was not known how much security and intelligence experience he had gained while in the Colonial Service. Sir Arthur Hockaday would be a good replacement but his appointment as Security Coordinator would be a considerable loss to the MOD, and there might be difficulties about re-absorbing him on his return from Northern Ireland. If, notwithstanding the objections, it was eventually decided to appoint a Deputy Secretary to be Security Coordinator, Mr. Hastie-Smith of the Cabinet Office would be a strong contender.

6. The Prime Minister, summing up the discussion, said that Sir Robert Armstrong, in conjunction with Mr. Stowe, should now approach Sir Antony Duff urgently to see whether he would be prepared to accept the appointment of Security Coordinator for six months. If Sir Antony Duff declined the offer, the other candidates would need to be considered further.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Norbury (MOD), Roy Harrington (NIO) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

John White.

J.A. Chilcot, Esq.,  
Home Office.

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