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Prime Minister (through CAW)

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This assessment concludes that ethnic minorities are the likeliest flashpoint - paras 21-26 of attachment refer.

PRIME MINISTER

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REVIEW OF POTENTIAL FOR CIVIL DISTURBANCE
IN 1981

MAD 27/4

..... My officials, in consultation with those from other Government Departments, recently carried out at my request a survey of the potential for civil disturbance in Great Britain over the next 6-12 months. I enclose a copy of their report.

The review was conducted against the background of the industrial unrest of the winter of 1979/1980; of outbreaks of spontaneous disorder in a number of cities, most notably in Bristol last year; of increasing nationalist violence, particularly in Wales; of the growth and proliferation of extreme right wing groups and their propensity for street violence; and of growing militancy among the ethnic minority communities (as evidenced by the recent events in Brixton).

The report was largely compiled before the Brixton disturbances took place but it clearly indicates that further violence in the ethnic minority communities is likely. We have made it clear that violence is not an acceptable way of expressing a sense of grievance, but we shall need also to do what we can to reassure these communities of the Government's concern for their problems. To this end, my attention will focus not only on Lord Scarman's Inquiry but also on my study into racial attacks and the activities of extreme right wing organisations.

The report's conclusions are otherwise not wholly pessimistic. On the industrial front in particular major disorder seems unlikely over the next few months. Prospects for the next pay round are necessarily less certain. Large scale political demonstrations - campaigning, for example, against unemployment or nuclear weapons - are likely to be frequent but mainly orderly events.

I shall, of course, keep you and our Cabinet colleagues informed of any changes in the situation over the coming months, and will in particular give notice where possible of any likely trouble spots. Colleagues in the other Departments involved in this review will no doubt do likewise. We shall aim to conduct a similar review for 1982 around the turn of the year.

I am sending copies of this minute to Cabinet colleagues, the Attorney General and the Lord Advocate, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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27 April 1981

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REVIEW OF POTENTIAL FOR CIVIL DISTURBANCE IN 1981

INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

1. The Home Secretary asked officials to review the likelihood of civil disturbance in Great Britain over the coming months. This review, which looks at the prospects for the next 6-12 months, is intended to complement the work of the Civil Contingencies Unit of the Cabinet Office (CCU) on the prospects of disruption to essential services. It considers three main forms of civil disturbance: mass demonstrations and marches; smaller demonstrations, including picketing, at focal points; and spontaneous disorder. Each may be the occasion of violence.
2. The review has been conducted by a group of officials chaired by the Home Office. A list of Departments involved is at Annex 1. The Northern Ireland Office have been kept informed, but the study does not extend to Northern Ireland, although the Irish problem may well have implications for civil disturbance in Great Britain, particularly in cities with large Irish communities such as Glasgow.
3. The main potential sources of civil disturbance are -
 - (i) economic and industrial issues;
 - (ii) opposition to nuclear weapons and nuclear energy;
 - (iii) Welsh and extreme Scottish nationalism;
 - (iv) racial issues and extreme right wing activity.

Welsh

These areas overlap, as with/nationalist opposition to the contraction of the coal and steel industry.

4. The assessment of the likelihood of serious disruption over a period of 6-12 months is necessarily speculative. More detailed reports on particular areas of difficulty will be made to Ministers as they arise.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL ISSUES

5. The three general issues underlying the potential for disturbance in the industrial sector in the coming months are:-
 - (a) pay;
 - (b) closures, redundancy and increasing unemployment;
 - (c) trade union opposition to the Employment Act 1980.

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The nature of any possible disturbance as a result of present industrial difficulties may be local (protests at a threatened plant closure) or national (demonstrations directed against Government policies).

6. On pay, greater appreciation of economic realities is being reflected in lower pay settlements and fewer pay disputes. Generally this seems likely to continue for the rest of the current pay round. Some industrial action is to be expected in both public and private sectors, but there is at present no reason to anticipate anything on the scale of last winter's steel strike with its attendant widespread and often disorderly picketing. Looking to the next pay round, a major question mark must arise over the miners' pay negotiations this autumn.

7. Unemployment, rather than pay, seems likely to be the main target for trade union activity in the coming months. Factory closures may give rise to local action such as sit-ins or pickets leading to public order problems, particularly in depressed areas. At national level, a number of further marches and demonstrations protesting about Government policies and unemployment have been planned: although ostensibly peaceful, these may offer an opportunity for exploitation by more extreme groups.

8. The TUC has adopted a stance of outright opposition to the Employment Act 1980 but has shown no enthusiasm for a concerted campaign on the lines of that mounted against the Industrial Relations Act 1971. The new provisions on picketing have not undergone any major challenge, but there is always the possibility that legal action over a local situation involving unlawful picketing could, quite unpredictably, escalate into a major confrontation. The (Trotskyist) Socialist Workers Party have declared their intention to confront the provisions of the Act by heavy picketing where possible.

Assessment

9. The incidence of industrial action is relatively low, and major disturbances over pay seem unlikely for the present pay round. Unemployment, redundancies and closures will (as illustrated by the abortive announcement of the NCB's pit closure programme) be a potential source of disturbance throughout 1981. Mostly peaceful rallies and marches can be expected, but these could give rise to some violence, possibly as a result of activities by subversive groups, and they will represent a considerable drain on police resources.

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OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND NUCLEAR ENERGY

10. After some years of quiescence, recent months have seen renewed opposition to nuclear weapons and growing concern about civil nuclear energy programmes, and the cooperation between the two movements, now limited, is likely to continue to increase.

11. On nuclear weapons this has been marked by a widespread revival of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) movement. The involvement of the Official Opposition in the anti-nuclear weapons movement represents a new departure, and the CND organisers may seek to encourage respectability by preserving a peaceful and orderly front. However, communists and their sympathisers hold influential positions within the CND hierarchy and other subversive groups have increased their interest in the movement.

12. References by President Reagan to the deployment of further US nuclear weapons in Europe may fuel the movement. Increased CND and similar activities in the next year are likely to be well supported and generally orderly, but may be accompanied by disorder as a result of the activities of more militant groups.

13. Apart from large set-piece demonstrations, smaller events at military establishments are likely. These may be disruptive, with the aim of seeking maximum publicity, and mounted with little or no advance notice, so requiring good liaison between civil and military police. The involvement of extremists in local CND groups could lead to minor sabotage if attempts were made to occupy or damage installations. And, if thwarted in efforts to mount effective protests at nuclear sites, demonstrators might switch to non-nuclear installations.

14. Unlike their counterparts on the Continent, with whom they seem at present to have little significant contact, the anti-nuclear energy campaign in this country has so far adopted a relatively peaceful approach. The two largest organisations are for the most part free of subversive influences, but anarchist-dominated groups are prominent in the campaign and Trotskyist groups are showing an increasing interest. Mass rallies and demonstrations, particularly at nuclear plant sites, may give rise to some disorder. The Government's open approach to policy and planning developments in this field will help to keep matters generally low-key. And, unlike the deployment of nuclear weapons, the speed at which nuclear energy is introduced can to some extent be regulated to accommodate changes in the climate of opinion.

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15. A particular feature of civil nuclear energy is the transport of radioactive materials and disposal of waste. There has been some disruption by the organisation 'Greenpeace', and this year's sea dump may be similarly disrupted. A research programme for the disposal option for high-level radioactive waste is under way. This requires planning permission for various research drilling projects, and public local inquiries will be spread throughout the latter part of the year. Opposition is organised and vocal, and as the drilling programme progresses it may serve as a catalyst to unite a number of the potentially dissident groups in promoting publicity-seeking demonstrations or vandalism. The isolation of many drilling sites will create difficulties for the police. And the programme may become a significant nationalist issue in Scotland and Wales.

16. Minor acts of attempted sabotage by anti-nuclear groups have also been directed against the transport of radioactive material. There is less scope for civil disturbance here but, as the anti-nuclear energy campaign grows, so will the risk of more dangerous activities by its extreme members.

Assessment

17. Large and mostly peaceful demonstrations protesting about both civil and military use of nuclear energy can be expected. Extremist groups may seek to exploit them by violent means. With increased involvement of subversives in these protest movements there will probably be scattered incidents at installations, drilling sites or transport depots associated with the nuclear programme, possibly involving minor sabotage.

NATIONALISM (including policy on Northern Ireland)

18. In the absence of any major focal point of direct concern to their cause, the militant activities of Scottish and Welsh nationalists are unlikely to be extensive. But nationalist elements, particularly those subject to extreme left-wing influence, will seek to exploit wider causes of discontent affecting Scottish and Welsh interests (eg unemployment in South Wales, test-drillings in Scotland), with marches and demonstrations as counterparts to those in England. Nationalist groups will seek to use such occasions to foment disorder and prompt nationalist discontent.

19. More recently, various Irish factions have increasingly been choosing Glasgow for their demonstrations. The developing pattern of protest and counter-protest there serves to underline the potential for serious disorder in Strathclyde

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arising from Irish issues, and the present 3 month ban on public processions in the region reflects the worsening situation.

Assessment

20 Civil disturbance may result from nationalist activity where issues facing the country as a whole are exploited for nationalist ends.

RACIAL ISSUES AND EXTREME RIGHT WING ACTIVITY

21. Extreme right wing groups continue to seek publicity through frequent provocative marches and rallies. The main groups are the National Front, the British Movement and the New National Front. The marches, though ostensibly peaceful, generate vocal and often violent opposition, often organised by the Trotskyist-sponsored Anti-Nazi League (ANL). Recently there has been a lull in its activity, but the ANL is undergoing something of a revival. The level of disturbance at marches by the extreme right is unlikely to increase very significantly, but will continue to impose a strain on the police.

22. Of more immediate concern has been the apparent increase in violent attacks on members of ethnic and other minorities. The Home Secretary has undertaken to inquire into the extent to which these are perpetrated by members of extreme right wing organisations and into possible counter-measures. Collectively such attacks on individuals have agitated the minority communities and made them more volatile and inflammable. In these circumstances spontaneous violence and disorder is easily sparked off.

23. There are also signs of growing militancy and disaffection on the part particularly of West Indian youths on such matters as unemployment, right wing activity and the Nationality Bill, and a number of militant organisations have grown up. There is also support amongst Asians for the Communist-dominated Campaign Against Racist Laws. Although ethnic minority groups may, as in London on 2 March, take to the streets in formal protest marches and demonstrations, the much greater risk is of spontaneous disorder of the sort seen last year in Bristol and recently in Brixton.

24. There is, particularly in London, the problem of sizeable communities of students and others from the Middle East and elsewhere. There is always the possibility of internecine conflict between or within these communities.

/25. Marches

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Assessment

25. Marches by extreme right wing movements are likely to be a regular feature of the next 6-12 months. With the marchers and opposition often looking for confrontation, these will probably create more difficulties for the police than the organised events on unemployment, nuclear disarmament, or other issues. But the police should be able to contain any disorder, using their public order powers and the tactics they have developed in recent years.

26. There is potential for serious disorder by members of the ethnic minorities. Increased militancy and large numbers of bored, unemployed youths may spark off disturbances in almost any large town, with the police a main target. Tension is aggravated by the fact that racial issues and immigrant areas have become the battlegrounds of the (predominantly white) extremists of right and left. There is increasingly organised political activity by racial minority groups, and the more militant will seize upon issues such as black unemployment and the Nationality Bill for campaigns of their own.

CONCLUSION

27. Although subversive organisations are not known to be planning to stage major violence they may well exploit issues and incidents. More set-piece marches and demonstrations are to be expected, and extremists will seek to exploit them by violence or disruption. Irish marches in Glasgow and marches by extreme right have in themselves a potential for serious disorder - partly because they are provocative and partly because of the opposition they generate. All these set-piece events are expensive in police manpower, and at this cost the risk of serious public disorder seems likely to be contained. But there is always a danger of an event erupting into something more serious, and it will be necessary to monitor the major events closely.

28. Other disorder, for example at nuclear installations, may be orchestrated by extremists. Public order arrangements and plans for the protection of key sites will need to be well co-ordinated, and steps are being taken to ensure this.

29. Finally, spontaneous disorder at focal points around the country must now be expected. This may be a sudden eruption, for example in response to a factory closure or strained industrial relations. But more likely, and potentially far more serious, are outbreaks of spontaneous disorder among ethnic minorities, such as was seen last year in Bristol and this year in Brixton. Work is continuing on the improvement of police arrangements for handling spontaneous disorder, but the problems that such incidents set the police, even in London, are serious.

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Further Measures

30. In the course of this review the need has become clear for the wider collation and dissemination of information which may be relevant to the prospect of disorder. For example, the announcement last year of widespread steel redundancies coincided with the Prime Minister's visit to Cardiff, and her arrival there was met with some disorder. The public order implications of developments in the areas identified in this paper, particularly those involving changes in Government policy, need to be borne in mind. It would be helpful if Ministers of the Home Departments could be advised of any development, such as the announcement of Government plans (eg those affecting plant closures), since public order considerations may be relevant to its timing.

Home Office
23 April 1981

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Annex

DEPARTMENTS TAKING PART IN THE REVIEW

Home Office
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
The Security Service
Scottish Home and Health Department
Welsh Office
Department of Industry
Department of Employment
Department of Energy
Ministry of Defence
Cabinet Office

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