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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 July 1981

Dear Andrew

As you know, the Prime Minister held a meeting with community leaders from Southall at 1230 on Friday, 10 July in the Caernarvon Hotel, Ealing. A list of those present is attached.

Mr. Jones (Community Relations Council) opened by saying that, in the aftermath of the recent civil unrest, the Government had a duty to give a moral lead, and to mend public attitudes to ethnic communities. He hoped the Prime Minister would re-affirm the Government's commitment to a multi-racial society. He welcomed the Home Secretary's recent statements, and asked the Prime Minister to support Mr. Whitelaw's views in a statement to Parliament. The reports of the Prime Minister's remarks on immigration made in India still rankled with the Asian community in Southall. He wanted to impress on her that immigrant communities were not a threat to law and order. The activities of right wing groups such as the Tory Action Group, who advocated the repatriation of all immigrants, made the Asian community in Southall feel extremely insecure. Southall had particular problems. It was among the boroughs with the highest unemployment in the Greater London area, and he was convinced that there were many unemployed people in the borough who were not registered as such. Housing was also a problem, and the borough had two of the most over-crowded wards in the GLC. He did not feel the local authority's housing policies would do anything to alleviate this problem. He felt the community in Southall was stable and cohesive, but these problems were becoming increasingly serious. Relations between the local authority and the Community Relations Council were not good. The local authority had refused a grant of £22,000 to the Council for administrative services. This made it difficult for the CRC to administer the £300,000 grant it had available from the MSC. He felt that the Police in Southall were not above criticism, but overall the CRC had good relations with the Police.

Mr. Sharma said that he would welcome a statement from the Prime Minister condemning the activities of extremist groups, and in particular the activities of the fascists. There were pubs in Southall where Nazi songs were performed. This enraged the Asian community. The community genuinely felt that they were the victims of discrimination. The Arts Council, for instance, appeared extremely reluctant to promote artistic activities in ethnic communities. He felt that most Asians in Southall felt that they were citizens of the UK, and not immigrants. They had no homeland

/to which they

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to which they could be repatriated. He too expressed his support for the local Police. If there had been criticism of the Police in the aftermath to the recent riots, this had only been because the Asian community had suddenly felt unprotected. He recognised that this might have been because the Police had simply been out-numbered. He said that he had been asked to convey two particular messages. First, that to prosecute too vigorously the Asians who had defended themselves against the skinheads in the recent riot would play into the hands of left wing extremists, who were already trying to make political capital out of the riots. Second, he understood that the Prime Minister of India was not coming to the Royal Wedding. There were fears that this would be presented as a response to the recent riots, and that pressure would be put on the President of India to refuse his invitation as well. Indeed, he feared that the President was subject to such pressures already.

Mr. Toor said he welcomed the Prime Minister's initiative in calling a meeting of community leaders. He had lived in Southall for 25 years, and felt that the Asian community saw the UK as their homeland. He felt, however, that too little was done for community relations in the area. The busing of Asian children in Southall had only been stopped two years ago. There were insufficient recreational facilities for young people in the borough. The Community Relations Council, which had been among the first to be set up back in 1965, needed more funds. His Association had been trying to convert the "Dominion" cinema into a recreation centre with little success. A planning application was currently with the Department of the Environment and the Home Office. As for extremist groups, he felt that the Public Order Act should be amended to outlaw all expressions of racialism. As Mr. Jones explained, a document calling for such an amendment to the Act had been sent to Mr. Bidwell, M.P., and Mr. Toor hoped the Government would support this proposal. He also felt that more power should be given to the Commission for Racial Equality to investigate racialist activities. On the question of relations with the Police Mr. Toor said that he shared the views of Mr. Jones and Mr. Sharma. He felt that the Police should place recruiting advertisements in local community papers. Only in this way would they be able to recruit from ethnic communities. He said that he could not believe Mr. Sharma's statement that links were being made between the Southall riots and the attendance of the Indian Prime Minister and President at the Royal Wedding, though he did acknowledge that Mrs. Gandhi had spoken to Indian community leaders on the telephone, asking after "her subjects".

Mr. Juj repeated Mr. Toor's remarks about the lack of recreational facilities for young people in the borough. He said that he ran a youth club, which had been started in 1964. The local authority was now charging his club for the use of school halls, and this was putting the club's future in danger. He had also been having considerable difficulty in finding facilities to hold a "Sikh Temple Tournament" which would largely comprise football matches and Indian wrestling tournaments. He supported the others in condemning the activities of extremist groups, and said that the extreme left had started a vigorous recruitment campaign in the aftermath of the riots.

/Mr. Greenway said

Mr. Greenway said that unemployment in Acton had fallen in the last year. There were more manufacturing jobs in Ealing than in any other London borough. There were many cinemas in the borough, and over 400 soccer teams, many of them multi-racial. Sir George Young added that there were many schools which should be ready to make facilities available for youth recreation. The hospitals in the borough could also make their grounds available. He did not feel that the relations between the Ealing Community Relations Council and the local authority were as bad as Mr. Jones portrayed. The local authority had tried to tackle the housing problems Mr. Jones had mentioned, and had set up a housing action area.

The Prime Minister said that she was very grateful to the community leaders for expressing opinions so frankly. She proposed that the press should be told that the meeting had been very useful, and that she now understood what the community leaders felt to be the sensitive problems in Southall. She would go on to say that no criticism had been made of the Police at the meeting, and that, on the contrary, all the community leaders felt that they had good relations with the Police, who did their best to understand the community in which they worked. She would be happy to say to the press that the activities of extremist groups, and specifically those on the right wing, must be condemned. She would conclude by saying that the meeting had been specifically to discuss the problems of Ealing and Southall, and that problems in Liverpool were quite a different matter, and had not been touched upon. The community leaders all agreed that this was a fair and accurate representation of what had been said.

I am copying this letter to David Edmonds (Department of the Environment), Miss Doran (Sir George Young's Office, Department of Health and Social Security) and to Chris Eagles (Department of Education and Science).

Yours
Willie Rickett

Andrew P. Jackson, Esq.,
Home Office.

LIST OF THOSE PRESENT AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH
COMMUNITY LEADERS FROM SOUTHALL ON FRIDAY 10 JULY 1981

Peter Jones - Chairman, Ealing Community Relations Council

Mr. Toor - Secretary, Indian Workers Association

Mr. Kapil Juj - Southall Youth Movement

Mr. Madhab Sharma - National Association of Asian Youth

Sir George Young M.P.

Mr. Harry Greenway M.P.