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Meeting with the Chief Constable of Merseyside in Police Headquarters, Liverpool, on Monday, 13 July, 1981, at 0930 hours

The Prime Minister met Mr. Oxford, the Chief Constable, together with the Deputy Chief Constable and other senior officers of the force. In opening the discussion, the Prime Minister said that her support for the police in dealing with the present outbreak of civil disturbances was complete and that whatever equipment they required to deal with the situation should be given to them.

In discussion, the following were the main points which were made:-

- (a) The force now had 400 MOD-issue helmets, and these had given police officers much more confidence that they would not be injured. They needed a simple adaptation, however: at present there was a gap between the helmet itself and the vizor, and this needed to be closed in some way. It was also important that the MOD's holdings of helmets should be replenished quickly in case more were needed by the police.
- (b) In the new situation, water cannon were now a necessary part of the equipment of the police, though it was not yet clear how many would be needed. More generally, a lot of urgent thought needed to be given to the development of tactics in handling of disturbances.
- (c) It was understood that the Metropolitan Police were acquiring new personnel carriers. There was a similar need on Merseyside where probably something of the order of 24 vehicles would be required.
- (d) The decision to use CS gas in Toxteth had been a very difficult one. Rubber bullets were already available if they were needed, but this was a matter on which the Chief Constable wanted to move very carefully.

The Chief Constable argued strongly that it was essential that those charged with offences arising from the disturbances should be dealt with quickly by the courts. Short sharp sentences would have a considerable deterrent effect. If people were remanded on bail,

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there would be no discouragement to those who wanted to commit similar offences in the future. Those who broke the law had to be clear that they had something to lose. Cases would be dealt with more quickly if Liverpool had more than the one stipendiary magistrate it had at present. The Prime Minister said that these were points she would pursue with the Lord Chancellor.

The Chief Constable said that his men had behaved with outstanding discipline during the disturbances. They had stood and been attacked by the crowds for 2 days, and 300 of them had been injured. But they had not responded in kind, and there had been no reports of gratuitous violence by the police.

The meeting finished at 1030.

*AW.*

14 July, 1981.

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B.R.