

SUBJECT cc Mother Self

Meeting with local authority representatives in the Liverpool Town Hall on Monday, 13 July, 1981, at 1050 hours.

Present:

Liverpool City Council

Sir Trevor Jones - Liberal Group Leader

Councillor J.D. Hamilton -
Labour Group Leader

Councillor S. Airey -
Conservative Group Leader

Mr. A.J. Stocks - Chief Executive

Mr. W.I. Murray - City Solicitor

Mr. R.M. Kirkham -
City Solicitor's Department

Merseyside County Council

Councillor J. Stuart-Cole - Leader of the County Council

Councillor N.C. Goldrein - Leader of Conservative Group

Councillor F. Doran - Deputy Leader of Liberal Group

Councillor Mrs. Margaret B. Simey - Chairman of the Police Committee

Councillor G. Bundred - Deputy Chairman of the Police Committee

Councillor S.T. Moss - Conservative Spokesman on Police Committee

Councillor A.H. Thomas - Liberal Spokesman on Police Committee

Mr. R.F. O'Brien - Chief Executive

Mr. C.K. Wilson - County Solicitor and Secretary

Mr. W.N. Cannon - Personal Assistant to Chief Executive

Following a short courtesy call on Councillor Cyril Carr, Lord Mayor of Liverpool, the Prime Minister met the representatives of the Liverpool City Council and the Merseyside County Council listed above.

The Prime Minister said that a week had passed since the disturbances in Liverpool and she imagined that the local authorities had now made considered assessments of the situation. She wanted to

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make it clear that it was essential that everybody gave the police their support. Society could not carry on if law and order were not upheld. The police, the fire service and the ambulance service in Liverpool had responded magnificently to the disorders. The police should be given whatever equipment they needed to deal with outbreaks of violence of the kind seen recently. More generally, resources had been poured into areas like Liverpool: for example, she remembered from her own days as Secretary of State for Education how much had been done to try to improve school facilities. The aim had been to encourage constructive developments from within the community. We had thought that this was the right approach, but events now suggested that it had not been. She was very ready to hear from them what they thought had gone wrong and how they believed it should be put right.

In discussion the following points were made:-

- (a) There was heart-felt gratitude in both Councils for what the police, fire service and ambulance service had done, and the police in particular had their unequivocal support. But there was undoubtedly a very strong feeling against the police in the Toxteth community. What had happened a week ago could not have built up overnight. There must in future be more involvement by the police in the community if they were to overcome the present resentment caused by what the community saw as police harrassment. A key factor in greater police involvement was for them to have a regular and continuous programme of school visits. It was also argued that one of the reasons for hostility to the police was that the relationship between the police authority and the police was not right. There was no clear definition of the role of the police authority, and this was something which, following the Home Secretary's visit the previous week, the County Council were hoping to pursue with the Home Office. On the other hand, it was pointed out that the previous police committee had not found any difficulty in carrying out its duties. The present move to make the Chief Constable accountable to a political body was wrong and should not be pursued.

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(b) Unemployment was a major factor in the present unrest in Liverpool. Out of 55,000 unemployed in the city, 18,000 were dealt with by the office which covered the Toxteth area. There were various MSC schemes in hand, but these were largely aimed at the short term. What was needed now was more permanent jobs in the longer term. For many years successive Governments had tried to make industry more efficient and not necessarily to create more jobs. The Government should now consider giving aid primarily to generate more jobs in the worst hit areas. This was such a massive problem that local authorities could only scratch its surface, and the need was for central government to have a long term strategy, embracing such initiatives as the creation of urban development corporations and enterprise zones, for the creation of permanent jobs. Unless this was done, the problems of Toxteth would not be solved. It was no good giving people good homes and splendid shopping centres if they had no jobs. This was not to excuse or condone violence, but if no work was available, especially for the young, it was understandable that a strong feeling against authority should develop. When they were unemployed and without hope of jobs in the foreseeable future, people felt that they were being written off by the rest of society. Their reaction was not against the police as such. They took their feelings out on the police because they were the nearest embodiment of authority. But even this tendency should not be exaggerated: most of the people of Toxteth were law-abiding. They wanted the police to protect them. In particular, they wanted to see more community policing: the local police stations which had been cut as economy measures should be opened up again, and there should be more policemen on the beat.

(c) There were undoubtedly racial tensions in the city. There was friction occasionally between white and black; and there was tension between the old immigrants whose forebears

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had arrived two or three generations ago, and new immigrants. But this was not a major cause of the recent outbreaks of violence, for on the whole relations between the different races in Liverpool were satisfactory.

- (d) Nor was housing a primary factor. In the last 10-15 years many of Liverpool's slums had been cleared, and people had been rehoused in good terraced housing and maisonettes.
- (e) Central Government already had a number of schemes to help Merseyside, but they were fragmented. Whitehall Departments all too frequently worked in isolation from each other, and one did something which was contradicted by something else which another was pursuing. There was a crying need for someone to take all these discrete activities and to put them together in a single package which worked in a coherent way. Similarly, there was room to improve communications between Whitehall and the local authorities.
- (f) While better coordination in Whitehall would undoubtedly help, it was important that central government did not rush into new large-scale capital improvement schemes as a response to the present disturbances. One message which the community leaders were expressing very clearly to the local authorities on Merseyside was that they wanted to be consulted before any decisions about new programmes were taken. A lot of thought was now being given to the best way of undertaking this consultation. It was likely to be a fairly protracted and inchoate process, but it nonetheless had to be gone through. Otherwise we might well get the wrong answer again, just as we had 10 years ago.

In conclusion, the Prime Minister said that for the longer term the creation of the UDC and the enterprise zone held out the hope of more jobs. Most of the future growth in employment in Liverpool would probably come initially from small firms. There was no escaping the fact, however, that if we were to keep existing jobs

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and create new ones, we had to be efficient. Genuine jobs would only be created if firms produced things people would buy. In the shorter term she thought that the many derelict sites in Liverpool could be tackled and jobs created in the process.

The meeting finished at 1200.

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14 July, 1981.