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Meeting with Liverpool Community Leaders in the Liverpool Town Hall
on Monday, 13 July, 1981, at 1205 hours

Present:

Mr. Wally Brown
Mr. Paul Sommerfeld
Mr. Delroy Burris
Mr. Peter Bassey
Mr. Dave Smith
Mr. Rashid Mufti
Mr. Roy Poland
Mr. Levere Hinds
Mr. Guideon Ben-Tovin

The Prime Minister said that she hoped that the community leaders would tell her frankly what they thought about the present situation in Liverpool. She had come to listen.

Mr. Brown said that he and his colleagues were a cross section of the people involved in and with Toxteth. Some represented groups within the community; while others were speaking only on behalf of themselves. He wanted to make it clear that the riot was not the work of outside agitators. Rather, it was the gut reaction of the local people to many things. He did not believe that an inquiry into the causes of the violence was necessary. The 2 main issues were clear. First and foremost, there was the question of policing. This had been the main trigger for the reaction from the community, and it had to be tackled urgently. Many people were hostile to Mr. Oxford's method of policing. Yet the fact that there had been no trouble since last Tuesday showed that policing at the community level could be effective and acceptable to the community. Policing had to be done with the cooperation of the community. The second major issue was unemployment and social conditions. These needed to be examined urgently. But it was essential that the community was not landed with schemes which it did not want. If the community was to be rebuilt, it had to be directly involved itself. There had to be consultations.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- (a) The recent trouble had not been due to racial tension, although the Chief Constable had suggested it was. The cause lay in Mr. Oxford's policing policy. There were different ways of keeping law and order. He believed in slapping people down and keeping them down. The police had attacked the very community leaders who were trying to bring the riot to an end. People were now beginning to complain again that the police were harrassing them once more. There was no doubt that trouble would start up again unless changes in policing were made. There was another way of keeping law and order. They wanted "community bobbies". It was significant that when police were brought in from outside Liverpool, they got on well with the local community. The Liverpool police, on the other hand, regarded anyone who was black as a criminal and acted accordingly.
- (b) It was often suggested that a lot of resources had already been put into Liverpool, but the reality was that the money so far had gone on a few advance factories, a few community centres, and some schemes to improve the environment. The totality was in fact small, and would not begin to solve the problem. More resources were needed for areas like Toxteth in order to provide more jobs, more education, and more leisure opportunities. A strong and imaginative response from central government was needed. Government must show a determination to get to grips with the problems. But any response must be made only after deep discussion with the local community. Every effort must be made to establish what they really wanted.
- (c) The community felt very strongly that Paddington School should not be closed.

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The Prime Minister said that although she disagreed with much that had been said, she recognised the genuineness of their views. Resources had been poured into areas like Liverpool. We had thought that we were tackling the problems of deprived areas in the right way by encouraging communities to create better conditions from within themselves. We had thought that if people were given good homes and good education, this would help them to lead satisfying lives. For example, out of 323 schools in Liverpool 190 of them had been classified as disadvantaged schools and given special allowances and special teachers, but she accepted that this approach had not been completely successful, and we now had to look at it again.

The Prime Minister continued that she was very concerned at what the community leaders had said about the police. This contrasted sharply with what the Southall community leaders had told her the previous Friday: they had not complained at all about the police but, on the contrary, had said that they regarded them as their friends. She was not concerned about the colour of people's skin, but she was concerned about crime. The police were there to prevent crime, and when it was committed, to hand the offenders over to the courts to be dealt with. She condemned anyone, whatever his colour, who attacked the police. She had not heard a word from Mr. Oxford against the local community. She begged them not to resort to violence nor to live in separate communities. It was essential that the community leaders went on doing all they could to prevent violence. Feelings, however strong, had to be expressed by talking, and problems had to be solved by a way other than that of violence.

The meeting concluded at 1300.

AMW.

14 July, 1981.