File 9A

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 December 1985

Many thanks for your letter of 17 December. We shall take careful note of the points you make.

As you know the Prime Minister is sorry you will be unable to attend the Seminar but is delighted that Councillor Simmons will be able to attend in your place.

(Mark Addison)

Michael Montague, Esq.

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National Consumer Council

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Telephone 01-222 9501

17th December, 1985

Mark Addison, Esq.,
Private Secretary,
10 Downing Street,
London,
S.W.1.

Dear Mark Addison,

Further to your letter of 2nd December, and our subsequent discussion, I am glad that it is agreed that Councillor Mrs. Lydia Simmons can attend the Seminar on Crime, to be held at 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 8th January next.

I would be grateful for your conveying to the Prime Minister my apologies for absence, as I shall be overseas on a long planned business visit for my Company.

It may be helpful, to those who are preparing the meeting, to have my initial thoughts on the subject, though these are not necessarily those of the Council, which has not considered the matter.

There is a distinction between the interests of people as citizens and their interests as consumers. Such interests are mirrored in a parallel manner as they arise from the individuals' status as consumers.

1. As a citizen, the individual:

   (a) has a strong interest in his/her personal safety, the security of property and possessions and the safeguarding of family members,

   (b) shares public interest that the law should be properly and fairly enforced, and that order should be maintained,

   (c) has a strong interest in ensuring that he/she is not treated wrongly by the police or the courts,

.....

(d) has a responsibility (and in most circumstances a duty) to assist and support those who are responsible for the maintenance of law and order,

(e) wants assurances that the prosecution authorities and the courts will ensure that, subject to appropriate discretions, criminals are properly and effectively identified and punished.

2. As a consumer, he/she:

(a) has a strong self-interest in goods, services or facilities which provide maximum self-protection against crime, or which will prevent/deter crime. For example:

* housing estates which are designed to deter vandalism/crime;

* well lit streets provided by the local authority;

* secure public transport;

* effective locking devices on cars;

* effective security devices for the home.

(b) The individual also consumes the services provided by the state to prove, deter, investigate and punish crime - principally police services and the criminal justice system. These are services paid for by the consumer through taxes and rates.

(c) As far as police services are concerned, the consumer:

* wants the right kind of policing services (perhaps different types of police for different functions) such as exist for traffic offences and T.V. licence evasion;

* wants a police service which commands public confidence;

* wants a police service whose priorities are also sensitive to those of the community which it serves;

* wants a police service which is publicly accountable and which does not place itself above the law;

* wants value for money from the police service;

.....

* wants adequate redress if the police service acts wrongly;

* wants the confidence from knowing whether the police have a record of an individual and, if so, that such a record is factually correct, and the uses to which the record might be put.

(d) As a consumer of the criminal justice system, the individual:

* shares the public interest that the courts provide a system of fair trial, which is as concerned to protect the interests of the innocent as it is to deal with the misdeeds of the guilty;

* wants procedures to be as simple, cheap and swift as consistent with the principles of justice;

* has an interest in ready access to legal aid if he/she is charged with a crime.

(e) The consumer may also have interests as the victim of crime. For example:

* adequate compensation, easily obtained, for harm suffered as a result of crimes of violence under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Civil compensation is available for a victim, but this may currently be insufficiently understood.

3. These principles may also be addressed to some of the current issues, including:

* how to improve relations between police and public, especially young and black people;

* what are the best institutional arrangements for improving police accountability and priority-setting?

  (N.B. Lord Scarman's Liaison Committees [and rival committees set up by some local authorities] have much in common with the Nationalised Industries Consultative Committee, whose joint meeting is administered by the Secretariat of this Council.)

* how to achieve effective and independent arrangements for complaints against the police;

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* how to get the public more involved in the work of the police (neighbourhood watch schemes);

* should the jury system be weakened further or strengthened?

  (N.B. This is one of the few ways in which consumers/the public participate more actively in public life in general, and in 'law and order' in particular).

* how to build a safer environment which will provide less opportunity for crime;

* what are the real "causes" of crime [greed, envy? evil? lack of moral values? deprivation? despair? alienation? lack of parental/educational discipline? unconcern about risk? and so on.]

* how do we instil a greater moral and social discipline into the fabric of society in all its aspects and at all levels?

  (N.B. Public figures, sports and entertainment idols, can command disproportionate influence for good and bad.)

For interest, I enclose:

Not enclosed

(a) A booklet called "The Police", published by us in conjunction with a B.B.C. T.V. series. It sets out the then rights in relation to the police. It is out of print and now much out of date, but provides an indication of our interest in some of the issues.

(2) Our 1980 Consumer Concern Study (detailed interviews with some 2,000 consumers) which produced limited information about:

* problems with vandalism and crime;

* the police as a source of assistance.

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Lydia Simmons, of 206 Goodman Park, Slough, Berkshire, SL2 5NL, Tel: Slough 32606, was born in the Carribean. She is a wise lady, with much experience gained from being active in the community and local authority of Slough, where she is currently Chairman of the Housing Committee, having just completed a period as Mayor. I believe that her presence will be helpful to the Prime Minister's deliberations.

If, thereafter, I can be of any assistance in arrangements arising as a result of the Seminar, I am, of course, willing to make myself available as necessary.

Yours sincerely

Michael Montague

Michael Montague,
CHAIRMAN

Encs.
MM/JP

HOME AFFAIRS' Crime Prevention
Seminar: Aug 1985.