

Rees-Davies  
np

20th November 1981

The Ulster Situation

Thank you very much for your letter of 17th November.

Of course, I share your deep concern about the Ulster situation, and I was most interested to hear of your talk with Airey a fortnight before he was assassinated.

Ian Gow has told me that you raised this matter at the 1922 Committee last evening.

We all hope that the prospect to which you refer in the 4th paragraph of your letter will not come about, and that it will not be necessary to make any change in the law.

However, you may rest assured that we shall pursue, relentlessly, those who are responsible for violence and that we will take all necessary steps to protect life and property in the Province.

William Rees-Davies Esq QC MP





FROM: WILLIAM REES-DAVIES, QC MP

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP,  
The Prime Minister,  
Private Office,  
The House of Commons,  
London, SW1.

17th November, 1981

*My dear Prime Minister*

The Ulster Situation

A fortnight before Airey met his death at the hands of the terrorists, I had a long conversation with him in which he pointed out that the situation in Ulster could reach such an extreme that the only solution would rest in the introduction of martial law. If martial law is introduced this would give power to the security forces and the police to take immediate action which can only be effectively taken by the introduction of martial law. The arrest of the members of the I.R.A. with trial by court martial would lead to the conviction of many of the terrorists for treason with the ultimate sanction.

Furthermore, every effort can be made to police the border hopefully with the cooperation of the Irish. The powers which exist only in time of war, and war it is, would enable the deeply infested areas in Ulster, such as the Creggan, to be fully inspected in accordance with military decisions. At the same time an unequivocal statement that the intention is to restore Government to Ulster could be made and with it a categorical undertaking to protect the minority of Roman Catholics for employment and for other purposes in Ulster.

The appointment of a Tribunal led by a suitable individual independent personality could ensure a fair and impartial protection of the reasonable rights of Catholics and Protestants alike.

The effect of declaring martial law will immediately bring under control Paisley and any other extremists who wish to take the law into their own hands. There is a widespread belief that despite your magnificent appeal from the City last night that there may still be virtually civil war with the Protestant community in particular bringing about the death of innocent Roman Catholics by way of reprisals.

In short, I believe that the time has come which Airey and I feared would come, the chance of reconciliation is now over, and immediate action is necessary. Many of us feel quite sure that unless the terrorists are apprehended, tried and shot, the support of many of the Protestants in Ulster may be lost with very damaging effects to our Party.

*Sincerely yours  
Billy*