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DG

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 April 1986

Dear Jim,

The Prime Minister had a brief meeting this afternoon with Sir Eldon Griffiths, at his request, to discuss a number of police matters in relation to Northern Ireland.

Sir Eldon said that he and the Federation had two objectives: to keep the RUC together and to keep them out of politics. With these aims in mind, he wanted to bring four problems to the Prime Minister's attention.

The first concerned the role of the RUC. They had four different jobs to do: conventional policing, counter-insurgency, coping with a massive public order problem and providing an armed frontier guard. This was too much, and he felt that the last task, that of frontier work, was of little value. The RUC were not able to carry out regular police duties in the frontier area such as serving warrants. Most of the time they sat in police stations which were in effect fortresses. Now that their families were under attack at home, they were becoming restive. He thought therefore that the Army should take over this task. The Prime Minister observed that this was an operational matter on which it would not be right for her to take a view. But she recalled having heard that the RUC themselves were content to continue carrying out duties along the frontier.

The second problem identified by Sir Eldon was that of parades. Given the scale of the opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement among the Protestant community, the RUC often found themselves having to confront their own friends and relations in parades. Mr. Wright of the Police Federation had summed up the problem by saying: we can't give them a tanning on the streets and then meet to drink with them in the evening. This conflict of loyalties was putting the RUC under intense pressure. The best way to defuse the situation was to allow as many parades as possible to take place while dealing firmly with any violent incidents, and regard banning of them as a last resort. In his view, the Chief Constable had been precipitate in banning the parade in Portadown at Easter. The Prime Minister said that this was once again a matter for the Chief Constable.

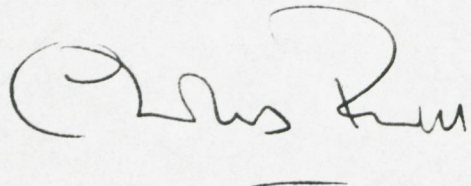
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Sir Eldon turned next to the role of the Federation itself. There was no doubt that it had been infiltrated to some degree by supporters of Dr. Paisley, and the Chief Constable was quite properly concerned about this. But he had made a great mistake in trying to impose a gag on the Federation. They were a statutory body and had the right, given to them by Parliament, to deal with legitimate matters of interest to their members, in particular welfare. It was essential that the Chief Constable should remove the gag as soon as possible. Otherwise he would only succeed in alienating the Force.

Lastly, Sir Eldon suggested it would be a good idea for the Prime Minister to visit Northern Ireland when the security situation permitted it, to unveil a plaque to the members of the RUC who had lost their lives, to talk to their widows and to deliver a firm speech about terrorism. He believed that such a visit and speech would give heart to the moderates. The Prime Minister said that she took note of the advice. She was concerned that such a visit might be boycotted by Unionists which would undermine its value. Sir Eldon disagreed. The speech might be made to a police audience and he could guarantee a good turnout.

The meeting had to end at this point. The Prime Minister said in conclusion that she would reflect on the points which Sir Eldon had made.

I am copying this letter to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

yours sincerely


Charles Powell

Jim Daniell, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.