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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

4 March 1985

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND, AT 1030 ON 4 MARCH 1985 AT 10 DOWNING STREET

The Prime Minister met Mr. Lange for an hour this morning. The New Zealand High Commissioner was also present.

European Community

After some discussion of economic matters, Mr. Lange said that he wanted to repeat his Government's thanks to the Prime Minister for having settled New Zealand's problems with the European Community over butter and sheepmeat. There should be no need to talk about them again for some time. The Prime Minister said that we had not got all we wanted - one never did in the Community - but a reasonable outcome had been secured. No matter what happened, Britain would continue to fight for New Zealand's interests in the European Community and elsewhere.

*Passage deleted and retained
under Section 3(4)*

*Wayland
20 May 2014*

Passage deleted and retained under
Section 3(4). Wayland
20 May 2014

Ship Visits

Mr. Lange said that he did not anticipate the same difficulties arising over RN ship visits as had happened with the United States. There would never be the same assumptions about RN ships as about American vessels. The strategic imperatives were different. He recognised that the Prime Minister had taken a consistent attitude in refusing to answer questions on whether RN ships carried nuclear weapons or not. He did not expect her to abandon this policy. He would be going back to talk to his Cabinet about the whole concept of strategic zones and would subsequently be in touch with the United Kingdom High Commissioner. It was unacceptable - and politically damaging - in New Zealand to engage in public questioning of the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister said that she did not want there to be any misunderstanding. Our ships had to be prepared to assume NATO tasks or duties in the Gulf at a moment's notice and be appropriately equipped for them. She could not guarantee that ships which visited New Zealand would not have nuclear weapons aboard; and there was no question of our either confirming or denying it. Mr. Lange said that Britain was New Zealand's oldest ally and it was inconceivable that Britain would overtly fly in the face of the New Zealand Government's policy. There would be an implicit assumption that RN ships visiting New Zealand were not carrying nuclear weapons. In effect it would be a solution for the UK on the lines of that found for the United States by Japan. In that case, a whole liturgy of assumptions were made which might or might not be justified.

The Prime Minister said that this made matters difficult for her. She could not have it said that any RN ship which we sent to New Zealand would not be carrying nuclear weapons. The High Commissioner said that the essence of the solution would be that New Zealand would have its policy and the United Kingdom their policy. No questions would be asked of the United Kingdom and permission for visits would be granted. The Prime Minister pointed out that this was not exactly what Mr. Lange had said. It seemed that he would say publicly that the United Kingdom would not embarrass New Zealand by flouting the South Pacific Nuclear-free Zone. Mr. Lange said that RN vessels operating in that part of the world would be assumed not to have the same capability as American vessels. His line would be: if an RN ship was supposed to be in a state of Al NATO preparedness, what the heck would it be doing in

Auckland anyway? He did not want to get into an awful struggle about this. He would return to New Zealand and consult his colleagues. He thought he could get into the position described by the High Commissioner. The Prime Minister said that she shared Mr. Lange's wish to avoid a public dispute. But she must make clear that it was possible that some ships which might visit New Zealand would be nuclear armed. She would have to be able to say publicly that the United Kingdom had not changed its position.

Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence

The Prime Minister said that she and Mr. Lange had very different views on these issues. She found it intellectually intolerable to hear it argued that nuclear weapons were morally indefensible, with the implication that other sorts of weapons were morally acceptable. Mr. Lange said that the particular proposition debated at the Oxford Union was a direct quotation from President Reagan, speaking in the context of the Strategic Defence Initiative.

You will wish to brief our High Commissioner on the outcome of this discussion. Mr. Lange showed evident signs of wishing to get off the hook on ships' visits and to be feeling his way towards a solution. But his thinking is still muddled. He seems to hope to get to a position where his Government could say that RN ships visiting New Zealand were manifestly not the sort of vessels likely to be nuclear armed. There is thus scope for continued misunderstanding which the Prime Minister insists be avoided. Any proposition which Mr. Lange may put following his return to New Zealand will therefore have to be scrutinised very carefully and our High Commissioner will want to be cautious in his reception of it.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

CHARLES POWELL

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.