

Prime Minister.

This note from Hedley broadly confirms
reports you have had through
the Home Office. MCA 11/9

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PRIME MINISTER

11 September 1985

BIRMINGHAM RIOT - CABINET DISCUSSION, THURSDAY 12 SEPTEMBER

From personal observation of the scene of the riot and of the police control room on Monday night, it was clear the police were taken by surprise and were baffled by the reasons for the riot. They were stung that years of community "spade work" appeared wasted and were convinced that the Carnival of that weekend had been one of the happiest ever.

The Chief Police Community Liaison Officer had been newly appointed - just three weeks before. He was sadly devoid of clues. His predecessor who had done the job for 16 years had left at short notice without training his successor.

The West Midland police Drug Squad is the second largest in the country without having the second largest drug problem. West Indians were prime suspects for Cannabis and various other drugs. The police denied that drugs were involved in the riot. I have reason to doubt this.

A leading enquiry which the police have in hand, not yet in the Media, is the search to discover why 100 men could so quickly gather after the 5.15 pm incident. There is evidence of some planning: the number of petrol bombs and the series of "ambush" telephone calls to the police early on Monday evening.

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Conclusion

The police were initially slow in fielding many officers, but did admirably later. They had good supplies of ready riot gear. They lacked a machine to push aside burning barricade cars. They managed to arrest a small number of 25 which is understandable, but again police cameras would have helped.

I am returning to Birmingham on Friday.

HB.

HARTLEY BOOTH

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EVENTS

ANNEX

9 September

- 11.15 am - Asian shopkeeper stabbed by black during attempted robbery, Villa Road, Hansworth.
- 5.00-5.30 pm - Black driver stopped by traffic policeman near Villa Cross Public House, Villa Road. 100 blacks appear on the scene, summoned by a call from the black driver. Police are investigating whether this response was orchestrated. Traffic policeman injured. Two youths arrested.
- 5.30-7.45 pm - Police receive a number of requests for help. They send CID. Police believe these calls were ambushes. (Press reports have not received this information.)
- 7.45 pm - Fire services attend the fire at Villa Cross Bingo Hall opposite Villa Cross Public House.
- 7.45-8.00 pm - Fireman told to let the building burn and is attacked by black youths throwing bottles, bricks and firebombs. This fireman was detained in hospital for suspected injury to his head.

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- 8.00-9.00 pm - Firemen retreat. Up to 300 police in riot gear in Villa Road. Lozells Road under attack.
- 9.00-9.45 pm - Police advance, youths retreat. Looting and burning of shops. Barricades built. 400 rioters. Police have difficulty getting past burning cars to reach the centre of the riot.
- 9.45-10.30 pm - 600 police in the area stoned and firebombed. Police advance over barricades.
- 10.30-12.00 pm - Area sealed and riot contained. Groups of 50 rioters run in an area of 4 miles from the heart of the riot.

Tuesday 10th September

- 3.30 am - Fire under control. Smoke continued for 12 hours later.
- 7.00 am - First bodies found in Lozells Road Post Office.

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