



SECRET

QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

30<sup>th</sup> September 1985

*COO 1/x*

*Dear Tom,*

CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR A POLITICAL STRIKE IN  
NORTHERN IRELAND

In his minute of 5 September, Michael Heseltine suggested that prison officers from Great Britain might replace striking prison officers in Northern Ireland.

Our manpower resources are very stretched in coping with the exceptionally high prison population here. Nevertheless in a crisis we would, of course, do what we could.

The main difficulty is that prison officers in England and Wales belong to the same trade union as their Northern Ireland counterparts. They would be very unlikely to agree to undermine action taken by their Northern Ireland colleagues if that action was organised and endorsed by the union. If the action in the Province was taken outside the context of the union, the attitude here might be different, but it would still be a long shot.

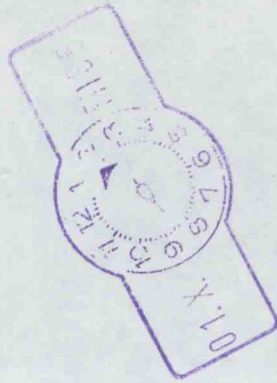
I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe, Michael Heseltine, David Young, Peter Walker, George Younger and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours,  
Douglas*

The Rt Hon Tom King, M.P.

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SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP  
Secretary of State for Defence  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
SW1

*M3PM*

18 September 1985

*Dear Secretary of State,*

CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR A POLITICAL STRIKE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your minute of 5 September, and in particular for assurance that you would have sufficient servicemen available to meet the plans which have been made to cover this eventuality. I realise that this could only be at some detriment to other defence commitments, and we shall naturally be doing all in our power to avoid matters reaching that point.

I appreciate your concern at the possibility that servicemen might be asked to replace striking prison officers, to the point of coming into direct contact with prisoners. This ground has of course been well tramped in previous planning for possible trouble with our prison officers. I understand your preference for finding manpower of other kinds - perhaps police or prison officers from Great Britain - for the purpose. No option is less than highly undesirable, and it does not make practical sense to attempt to make hard plans about this extremity until we are approaching closer to it. I should say, by way of reassurance, that it does seem very unlikely even if the course of Anglo Irish events does give rise to disturbances here more generally.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Secretaries of State for Employment and Energy and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours sincerely,  
Jonathan Duke-Evans*

TK  
(Approved by the Secretary  
of State and signed in  
his absence)

JLD

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