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10 DOWNING STREET

29 May 1986

From the Private Secretary

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Dear Jim,

CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister has considered the Northern Ireland Secretary's minute of 29 April and the Defence Secretary's comment dated 22 May.

The Prime Minister considers it important that our contingency plans should be as effective as possible, in case political strikes should in due course take place in Northern Ireland. One key point is that Ministers, in deciding how to deal with any threat of strikes, should have a clear idea of how long our contingency plans would maintain essential services. The period of three weeks mentioned in the Northern Ireland Secretary's minute would represent a significant restriction on the Government's prospects in coping with a sustained political strike. The Prime Minister would be interested to know the calculations which lie behind this estimate of three weeks.

The Prime Minister agrees with the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Defence Secretary about the importance of management and senior technicians being available to work in the power stations and other utilities. Given the widespread opposition among Protestants in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, there must be a significant risk that many managers and senior technicians would not work during a strike. The Prime Minister therefore wonders whether we should consider the feasibility of importing the necessary management and technical personnel from Great Britain, to work at least in the fields of electricity generation and oil supplies. Feasibility will depend on technical questions among others - for instance whether the electricity generating plant in Northern Ireland is familiar to managers and technicians in Great Britain. This idea might be considered by the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Energy, at least in a preliminary way, without consulting people outside government at this stage.

BF
The Prime Minister has noted the difficulty of producing contingency plans for the distribution of essential supplies any further than the distribution centres. She would be interested to know who would

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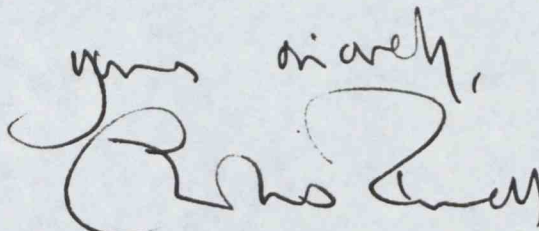
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administer these centres and issue supplies to people who called for them.

BR
Even though hospitals in Northern Ireland have not been affected by industrial action in the past, there must be some risk of this happening in the future. The Prime Minister suggests that an outline contingency plan would be a wise precaution. As regards ambulance services, the Prime Minister wonders whether we can be confident that voluntary organisations could cope during a prolonged strike and whether it would be prudent to have a contingency plan in case they could not.

The Prime Minister agrees with the Defence Secretary about the unsuitability of military personnel to act as warders in prisons or to undertake other tasks which would bring them into direct contact with prisoners.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the other members of OD(I) and to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES POWELL

Jim Daniell, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

COSTACE

Draft letter from Charles Powell to

J A Daniell Esq
Northern Ireland Office

Contingency Planning for Northern Ireland

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Mr Powell

we spoke

G. McCall 29
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