



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

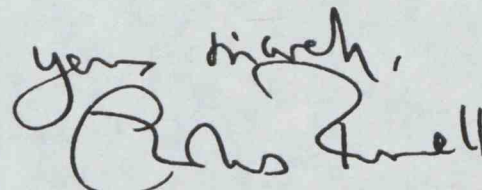
18 December 1985

Dear Richard,

The Police Building Programme in
Northern Ireland

The Prime Minister has seen a copy of the Northern Ireland Secretary's letter of 17 December to the Defence Secretary seeking the commitment of further Royal Engineer resources to the GOC in Northern Ireland, to help with the police building programme. She shares Mr. King's assessment that this is an essential step and one which we ought to be able to announce as soon as possible. She hopes very much that the Defence Secretary will agree.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Northern Ireland Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for the Environment and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely,

(CHARLES POWELL)

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

BM.

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CCP



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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(1)

SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2HB

Prime Minister
Agree that I should
minute in support of
Mr. King?
17th
December 1985

CDP
17/12.

Yes no

Dear Secretary of State,

THE POLICE BUILDING PROGRAMME IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Provisional IRA have long sought to intimidate building contractors (as well as their work forces) who carry out work for the security forces. They have recently sharply stepped up their campaign, and a number of major building contractors have now withdrawn from security contracts. PIRA have coupled this tactic with a violent series of attacks on police stations, where within the last two weeks three RUC stations have been destroyed or so badly damaged as to be unusable. The knock-on effect has caused work to stop on all but two of the ongoing major projects; minor works and maintenance contracts are also badly affected, and there are indications that supplies may soon come directly under threat. As a result, the police building programme is now under intense pressure. PIRA have almost certainly stumbled on this targetting strategy, but they are now in no doubt of its effectiveness.

This is a struggle which we simply cannot afford to lose. We are urgently looking at what can be done. Some confidence may return, sooner or later, to the construction industry; the delegation of powers to local police should enable some very minor maintenance work to be done very quietly. DOE Works Services staff should be able to carry out a certain amount of maintenance around Belfast; and the Police Authority for Northern Ireland are giving urgent thought to the possibility of recruiting a direct labour force for other areas of the Province. Finally, we are in touch with PSA on the possibility of setting up a consortium in Great Britain to undertake at least some of the major and long-term projects.

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But while some or all of these possibilities may be necessary for the longer term, none of them can have any early or significant impact. We must serve clear notice of our determination, and my purpose in writing therefore is to ask you to commit further Royal Engineer resources to the GOC. The Engineers already in the Province have done sterling work, not least most recently in their "first aid" operations to allow some form of policing to continue in the bombed areas, and in their work at very short notice to protect the buildings used for the Anglo-Irish Secretariat and Conference. But their capacity is limited, and the calls on their services already heavy.

I hope therefore that you will be able to commit a further squadron of the Royal Engineers, together with additional building specialists, to the Province. I understand that a force of this kind could be devoted to rebuilding the police stations we have lost, which would give the clearest proof of the Government's will both to the terrorist, and even more importantly, to the general public in Northern Ireland. In asking for this assistance, I am very conscious that this would imply some further infantry support to protect the Engineers in the course of their work. I also appreciate that the process of drawing up building plans would take some time, but even an announcement of our intentions, together with the sight of an advance party on the ground (who could possibly help with some minor work in the interim) would be of enormous help.

Perhaps I may make two other comments. First, the level of terrorist activity has remained high over a long period, and the security forces' profile has had to be raised correspondingly. The GOC has given outstanding support to the RUC, and I know that he has had to cancel leave and training. If the terrorist campaign continues for much longer - and there is no sign of any diminution as yet - the question of some further relief for the Army forces already here is bound to arise. Second, I recognise that these measures are going to involve substantial costs. Clearly this is unwelcome but I see no alternative to the approach I have outlined if we are to retain any credibility as to our determination to wear down the PIRA.

Copies of this letter go to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd, Kenneth Baker and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely
Edward
(Private Secretary)
for T K

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

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