

cc PS/Mr SCott (B&L)
PS/Mr Needham (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Bloomfield ✓ 16/1-
Mr Barry
Mr Ford, DOE
Mr Stephens
Mr Palmer
Mr Ferneyhough
Mr Gilliland
Mr Blackwell
Mr Radcliffe
Mr Coston
Mr Bell
Mr Ehrman

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L)

INTIMIDATION OF BUILDING CONTRACTORS

Your note of 11 December refers.

2. Mr Stephens chaired a meeting of a wide range of interests - including the RUC, Police Authority, Army and DOE Works Service - on 13 December. It was generally agreed that the withdrawal of contractors (and suppliers) was having a particularly severe impact on the construction and maintenance of police accommodation. Work on prisons and Army building projects is also affected but the focus of the PIRA campaign is clearly on the police, as evidenced by the recent bombing of RUC stations.

3. We are pushing forward a series of initiatives and we also recommend that the Secretary of State for Defence be approached for urgent additional Royal Engineers' support.

Army View

4. The two Royal Engineer Squadrons in Northern Ireland are capable of meeting the Army's immediate needs for minor works and maintenance; and in the same way as they have assisted with the initial repair work at Ballygawley and Toomebridge RUC Stations they can provide a limited amount of emergency assistance towards the reinstatement of bomb damaged stations. However, the existing capacity is limited and more substantial tasks would require the deployment of additional units; for example, the rebuilding of Ballygawley, Toomebridge and Tynan stations would require one RE Squadron and infantry company (as a guard force) and an appreciable number of specialists, for a minimum of 12 months. MOD has indicated that this level of assistance

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could only be secured at the expense of other Army commitments world-wide, and would require an approach at Ministerial level.

Prisons Works

5. Some contractors have returned to work, including a number of sub-contractors at the Maghaberry site. Their continuing involvement is not obvious and they are not on site every day. Most of the major works projects which have been halted are not in the essential category and delay of up to 2 months or so would not cause us serious problems. The position will be kept under review; there is the prospect that other contractors will find it possible to return after the Christmas holiday break. In the meantime prisons trades staff can handle most essential maintenance and other priority tasks.

Police Works

6. While the major works programme is badly affected by the withdrawal of contractors and suppliers, the Police Authority is more concerned about the immediate impact on other priority works, many of a security nature, and on essential maintenance at existing stations. In conjunction with the RUC they have identified a number of tasks, including the reinstatement of Ballygawley and Toomebridge which, for operational (and presentational) reasons, should be completed as a matter of priority. To this end the Authority has drawn up a range of options to meet requirements for essential maintenance and other vital work at police stations.

(a) RE Assistance

The Royal Engineers can provide invaluable assistance in securing bomb damaged police stations - to allow a policing presence to be maintained; and the provision of screen fencing and related security work, particularly at vulnerable locations.

(b) Local Contractors

The RUC at local level may be best able to identify local personnel who could be willing to handle small scale

maintenance. Arrangements are therefore being made to give designated Premises Officers delegated authority to place orders for work valued up to £500. In addition there are a number of (mostly small) contractors still working on police and prisons works. While few of these would be capable of undertaking major contracts there might be some who would be prepared to undertake minor projects which have been halted. DOE Works Service will explore the possibilities but in their view no significant impact is likely in the immediate future.

(c) DOE Direct Labour Squads

Existing teams of workmen (normally involved in work at Government offices) could be redeployed on to police work. The Police Authority and DOE Works Service have made preliminary soundings and the majority of the workforce has indicated that they would be prepared to work at police stations. Given sensitive handling, this force could be extremely useful for maintenance and minor works, but it is unlikely that they would be deployed much outside the Greater Belfast area.

(d) PANI Direct Labour Squad

This would be similar to the arrangements outlined at (c) above, except that PANI rather than DOE would employ the workmen (some of whom might be workers laid off as a result of the halting of existing contracts). A difficulty might be the shortage locally of suitably qualified supervisors and persons with contract management experience. Such persons may have to be recruited in GB, and special rates of pay may be necessary.

7. Each of these options would be geared towards securing some movement in the minor works/maintenance field. None would provide an adequate response to the major capital works programme, which can only properly be managed by the larger building contractors. If

local firms maintain their withdrawal, the opportunity should be extended to firms in the rest of the UK. The choice of projects under this arrangement would be crucial: it is important that they should be significant in operational terms and also capable of being set in hand as soon as the necessary contractual arrangement has been established.

8. More generally, there is the emerging problem of building supplies. While there is as yet no specific threat against suppliers who are associated with security contracts, there is unease and a number of men have withdrawn their services. The implications are serious; already ready mix concrete is in short supply with only one bulk supplier still available. It may be necessary for NIO to requisition a ready mix concrete plant to maintain a source of supply to the Royal Engineers and working contractors. In such circumstances the plant would be operated (and guarded) by the Army.

Conclusion

9. In the light of the above, the following action has been put in hand.


- (i) The Police Authority and DOE will examine the scope for using DOE Direct Labour teams on selected minor works/maintenance projects.
- (ii) Designated Premises Officers at police establishments are being given delegated authority to arrange for minor repair/maintenance work to be carried out by locally appointed contractors.
- (iii) The Police Authority and DOE Works Service will work up a scheme for the establishment of a Direct Labour force under Police Authority direction and control.
- (iv) Contingency plans will be prepared for the requisition of a concrete plant to maintain essential supplies to security contracts.

- (v) DOE Works Service will consult PSA about the possibility of forming a consortium of GB building firms to undertake a package of priority projects in the police major works programme.
- (vi) A meeting has been arranged between representatives of the local building industry and RUC Security Branch to provide contractors with advice and hopefully some reassurance about the extent of the threat.

10. None of these initiatives can however have an immediate and demonstrable effect. As agreed at SPM this morning the only immediate results which could be secured would be through the reinforcement of the existing Royal Engineer units. A squadron of Royal Engineers, plus additional building specialists could probably over a year or so rebuild the three destroyed police stations. I attach a draft letter for the Secretary of State to send to the Defence Secretary.

11. It should be noted that several weeks would be devoted to the preparation of the building plans. It seems essential, however, that at least an advanced party should be despatched immediately to build public confidence; they could be employed on other minor works until the entire contingent is ready to start on the priority rebuilding projects. PUS has also suggested that we might signal a possible future requirement for non-specialist personnel if the present terrorist campaign continues at the same level; and indicate the financial consequences associated with this emergency but unavoidable action. The draft therefore reflects both points.

12. A further meeting of interested parties has been arranged for 3 January to review progress. I will keep Ministers informed of developments.



W J A INNES

16 December 1985

DRAFT LETTER TO MR HESELTINE, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE
FOR SIGNATURE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

cc Prime Minister
Chancellor of the
Exchequer
Home Secretary
Secretary of State
for Environment

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.

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.