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DUS(B)86/8/6032/GE

26/1/8.

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)

*PS/Mr Bloomfield

25/8/9.

*Mr Brennan

Mr Innes

*Mr Chesterton

Mr Blackwell

PS/MR SCOTT (B&L)

* With copy of reference

CROSS BORDER SECURITY COOPERATION

In his minute to you of 15 August, Mr Innes mentioned that I intended to tackle the Chief Constable that afternoon about both the tone and the substance of Chief Supt Henry's letter. I duly raised it with him in the course of a general round-up of current matters such as I try to have with him every two or three weeks.

2. I told Sir John that I wanted him to be in no doubt about the extent of the irritation and exasperation with which the letter in question had been received. Remarks such as that police stations were visited by Ministers more frequently in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom were both deeply offensive and almost unbelievably silly. What else would one expect? As a display of ingratitude the letter would be hard to beat. The RUC had a great many very loyal friends but there was a limit to how far even the most loyal were prepared to be kicked in the teeth at frequent intervals and he must not be surprised if some of them eventually lost patience sufficiently to resign from the club. I did not yet know what Ministers thought of the letter but I doubted if they would think any more highly of it than I did, which was not saying much.

3. During the subsequent conversation, which was fairly strained throughout as I meant it to be, we zigzagged continually between what are really two distinct though related themes; it will be preferable to record them separately.

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Ministerial contact with the police outside Headquarters

4. Initially the Chief Constable took a hard line on this. What had emerged from Mr Scott's recent visits to border divisions was that Ministers were receiving, if not actively seeking, views on policy matters from those with whom they came in contact. He regarded this as intolerable; it was from him and his headquarters staff that such views should come. He did not say in terms that he would have to put a stop to visits if that was the only way to prevent policy views from being discussed in the field, but he implied that they might well have to be drastically reduced in frequency on this account.

5. I told him that whether he liked it or not Ministerial visits to the police outside headquarters would continue and he had better get used to the idea. The rationale should be obvious to him; it was essentially the logical extension of Ministerial accountability, not only for public order and security but for the governmental process as a whole. We accepted, of course, that we should look to headquarters for formal views and advice on policy matters; that was not in issue. But surely he could understand that when Ministers stood up in the House to speak on these matters - frequently in defence of the RUC - they needed to have in their minds not only the official policy line conveyed in headquarters briefing but also the background colour which only first-hand experience could provide. It was all part of the process of building up an in-depth understanding of the issues. I could not believe that he would really prefer, or respect, Ministers who never ventured outside the ivory tower.

6. Thereafter the Chief Constable shifted his ground considerably nearer to ours. But he was still unhappy at the thought of all sorts and conditions of policemen unburdening themselves to Ministers. Many of those speaking at the local level inevitably lacked the perspective of knowing the whole picture, even if they could resist the temptation to mount their favourite hobby-horses. I told Sir John that I knew quite well what he meant; it was a common experience for everyone who made

visits, and one soon learned to aim off. Indeed, the more visits that Ministers made, the more experienced they were in judging the cogency and relevance of what was said to them! We would certainly accept that it was important to ensure that the local colour gleaned from visits was not distorted or misleading and I was confident that Mr Scott would take this point sufficiently to be willing as a matter of routine to check with the Chief Constable the views that he had picked up during recent visits before they went into the memory bank, insofar as he did not do so already. The Chief Constable seemed to find reassurance in this thought, though I am afraid he is likely still to do all he can to discourage his officers in the field from uttering anything more than banalities to Ministers in future. I think we shall have to wait and see whether in the event there is clamping up of such degree that it seriously affects the value of visits.

Representations on Garda inadequacies