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1. PS/Mr Scott (B)

2. PS/Secretary of State (B)

cc PS/Sofs (L) - M  
PS/Mr Scott (L) - M  
PS/PUS (B&L) - M  
PS/Mr Bloomfield  
Mr Brennan - M  
Mr Innes  
Mr Ferneyhough  
Mr Gilliland  
Mr Chesterton - M  
Mr Elliott  
Mr Bell - M  
Mr McKillop

*Mr Legum*  
*Mr Doherty*  
*For file*  
*Mr Kennedy*

*Jack*  
*24/3.*

**LOYALIST DAY OF ACTION ON 3 MARCH: CHIEF CONSTABLE'S REPORT**

1. Mr Stephens's minute of 19 March said I would prepare a critique of the Chief Constable's report on the "day of action".

The RUC's approach

2. Like us, the police had been dusting off their contingency plans for use in the event of politically motivated industrial action for some time prior to the Unionist Joint Working Party's announcement on 25 February of a day of action on 3 March.

3. The principal objectives of the RUC's plans are to facilitate legitimate forms of protest while:

- a. dealing with illegal forms of protest in accordance with the law and existing force policy;
- b. preventing intimidation by the deployment of sufficient numbers of police in areas where such action is anticipated; and
- c. making every effort to ensure that roads - particularly designated priority routes - remain open.

4. However, these specific objectives must be seen against the background of the Force's overall strategy, which is identified in the report as follows (para 4.1):

"... our primary consideration was to handle the dispute in a manner which would ensure that it ended on 3 March and that order would be maintained. Underlying it all was the need to preserve the peace and prevent sectarian conflict".

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2

It is arguable that these general and specific objectives were incompatible in a situation of such widespread picketing, road-blocking and intimidation. Although the police manpower commitment was "possibly the biggest ever on a single day" (para 4.5) with more than 6,000 officers on duty between 1500 hours on 2 March and the early hours of 4 March, the size of the problem confronting them was correspondingly formidable. There were some 669 road-blocks, 99 malicious fires, 242 other incidents of damage to property, and 91 attacks on the police (including 18 on police homes). 47 policemen and women were injured. It is not surprising, therefore, that "the objective of keeping main routes open, preventing intimidation and ensuring that those who wished to go to work could do so was not achieved evenly in all areas" (para 9.2).

5. However, the report does not explain the extent to which efforts were made to identify priority targets for positive police action and whether instant reaction reserves were maintained centrally and regionally to reinforce police action at those priority targets. It is clear from the earlier parts of the report that unlawful actions were expected and the most likely troublesome areas had been identified (accurately as the conclusion of the report makes plain). If police resources were inadequate then the report might be expected to discuss the reasoning behind not making greater use of the Army. Paragraph 4.6 indicates the very limited use made of the Army outside of their usual anti-terrorist role. It is not clear for instance on the extent that Army helicopters were tasked for surveillance or airborne command post tasks.

The RUC's assessment of their performance

6. The Chief Constable is obviously pleased that police action succeeded in preventing any loss of life, serious sectarian confrontation or damage to property, while at the same time preventing republican terrorists from exploiting the situation. He accepts that the police were unable to keep as many roads open as they would have liked but blames this on a lack of infinite resources and, with some bitterness, the failure of DOE industrial staff to assist with the clearance of the

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M and West Link after they were covered with oil, broken glass and nails during the first few hours of the protest. There is no doubt that the eight hours delay in opening the M1 is unacceptable. Some of the delay was due to senior and middle management in DOE Roads Service striving mightily to provide the service required by the police but being in the end unable to deliver their workforce. It must be a contingency planning assumption for the future that on a similar occasion the same difficulty will apply; and we are drawing up with the Director of DOE Roads Service, HQ RUC and HQNI a simple, quick and effective "mini-MACM" plan that will ensure that from the outset the RUC will look to HQNI to respond to requests for route clearance where the RUC cannot effect immediate clearance themselves.

7. The report does not touch on the difficulties that arose over access to Aldergrove Civil Airport. All the evidence available to the DOE and NIO is that the police did not accord a high priority to preventing heavy picketing and intimidation on the key route to Aldergrove which is particularly vulnerable to this sort of action because of the normal restriction to one entrance through the PVCP. It is for consideration that the RUC should be given a specific high priority task by the Government to keep traffic flowing to and from the Airport because of the political importance of preventing the protesters from carrying out their threat to cut off Northern Ireland from entry by sea or air.

#### Command and Control

8. Appendix C to the report sets out the guidelines for the RUC's contingency planning for 3 March. The RUC's devolved system of command and control down to divisions is very apparent. It is for consideration that a Province-wide action such as that on 3 March cannot be most effectively dealt with by this system which leads to lack of coordination, unnecessary dispersal of resources, inconsistency of police response and a very poor information flow for centralised decision-making. All the lessons of the Miners' Strike pointed to the effectiveness of the central control exercised on a much wider geographical scale by ACPO at the National Reporting Centre. It is very



**CONFIDENTIAL**

4

surprising to find requests for Army support including the use of helicopters delegated to divisional commanders; the Army and its specialised equipment are a very effective resource most of which is best allocated to a central reserve for tasking by HQ RUC as and when needs arise.

#### Conclusions

9. The Chief Constable's verdict, that the police generally performed extremely well, but with some unfortunate exceptions. is in general policing terms a reasonable one. It must remain a matter of conjecture what the outcome would have been if the police had adopted a more robust approach from the outset particularly on certain pre-planned high priority target areas. In dealing with the outbreaks of violence in hard Loyalist areas during the evening the police were effective <sup>in</sup> adopting the well-proven tactics of containment and then suppression developed during the 1981 Hunger Strikes. It may well have been that early robust action would have driven the hard-liners back into their own areas where they would have tried to create mayhem but at least this would have left much of the Province free for movement.

10. Given the threat of serious violence, including the use of firearms by UDA/UVF elements (knowledge of which was available to the police for some days from intelligence sources) and the increased pressure on their resources following the eleventh hour decision to extend the protest to 24 hours, greater use should undoubtedly have been made of the Regular Army and the UDR.

11. The report provides considerable evidence that the devolved command and control system of the RUC is not the most effective means of responding to the challenges posed by Province-wide disruption. Some way must be found of urgently persuading the RUC to examine critically their present arrangements and to find a flexible means of moving to a more centralised system when the occasion demands it.

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Finally, although police operations should not be subject to direct political control, it is for consideration that the political and constitutional stakes are too high in a direct challenge to the ability of the Government to govern, such as occurred on 3 March, for the Chief Constable and the GOC not to be required to present their operational plans to the Secretary of State so that he can question their likely effectiveness and flexibility, and identify limitations and constraints before the event rather than to have them explained to him defensively afterwards.



B A BLACKWELL  
Law and Order Division

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