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THE PRIME MINISTER

28 March 1987

*Dear Jim,*

Thank you for your letter of 24 March. In it you suggest that I am not being kept informed of events in Northern Ireland: this is not so. Your letter is also misleading in appearing to attribute the violence in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I do not need to remind you that the current wave of terrorism, from both Republican and Loyalist extremists, started in the late 1960s. Although every death is one too many, the outstanding efforts of the Security Forces have achieved a very substantial fall in the level of casualties from the high levels of the mid-70s. You mentioned the figure of 18 people killed this year in Northern Ireland, and we clearly share a real regret over these deaths, although you did of course include in your figures, the seven people killed in the vicious feud within one of the terrorist organisations. Tom King and I are convinced that our existing security policy is the policy best calculated to eradicate terrorism in the long run. It is based on bringing terrorists to justice before the courts and working at all times within the law. We shall resolutely adhere to this policy, and I hope that you and your colleagues will use your powers of leadership to ensure the widest public support for the security forces in their vital task.

In your letter, you claim that the Public Order Order is discriminatory; it is not, nor does it make the holding of parades and marches illegal. The powers available to the police and to the Secretary of State under the new Order to

impose conditions on, or to ban, public processions and demonstrations do not differ in any significant way from the powers which were available to them under the 1981 Order and earlier Stormont legislation. The only change of substance in the law relating to public processions in Northern Ireland is that in future the police are to be notified in reasonable time of all processions. I am surprised that you should think this unreasonable: responsible organisers of processions have for years been in the habit of giving the police notice of their intentions - but others have not, and it is these unnotified processions that do most to disrupt the lives of the policemen who have to be diverted without proper notice to policing these processions, and by disrupting police planning and operations inevitably reduce the resources available for the campaign against terrorism. Your own sincere concern to see terrorism defeated, and to support the welfare of the policemen and soldiers who fight terrorism on our behalf, should lead you to support the requirement to notify processions, and I hope that you will do so.

In the light of the seriousness with which you view the situation, it must be sensible to sit down and discuss how best we can work together in the interests of Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole in helping the fight against terrorism, and in making political progress. I therefore make clear again that we are very ready to discuss these and other matters with you and other representatives from the Northern Ireland constitutional political parties.

I understand that your letter was released to the press, and I am therefore similarly releasing this reply.

Yours sincerely

James Molyneaux

The Rt. Hon. James Molyneaux, J.P., M.P.