

J R Ingram Esq
Northern Ireland Office
Bundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4

30 March 1978

Dear

CIVILIAN SEARCH UNIT - ABSENCE FROM DUTY 7 MARCH 1978

1. We in DOCS have considered Mr Baird's letter of 22 March to Mr Morrison but are regretfully unable to approve or endorse the former's proposals to deal with the entire Unit's absence from duty on 7 March.
2. In normal circumstances attendance at a funeral would be met by a request for time off which would usually be granted. Even in the most compelling circumstances, however, regard would have to be had to maintaining a service to the public and recognition that not everybody could be released.
3. Much as we sympathise with the sentiments which led to the stoppage of work and the understandable wish of large numbers to attend Miss Spence's funeral, we could not endorse the action of the Search Officers in withdrawing the services of the entire force and, in effect, presenting the Police Authority with a "fait accompli" decision.
4. Despite the public demonstration nature of the action taken, the element of irresponsibility towards the security situation and the additional burden thrown at short notice on the Army and the RUC, we would not regard the stoppage as calling for any disciplinary action. Rather we would see it as being covered by the minimum response to unauthorised absence - ie either by sacrifice of annual leave or by loss of pay (special leave without pay).
5. I appreciate Mr Baird's wish to resolve this particular problem by special consideration which would not be regarded as creating a precedent. However, the fact remains that any such special consideration would inevitably create a precedent - and a dangerous one. Whether we like it or not, it leads us into judgements on the merits of staff actions and would leave us open in the long run to charges of bias dependant on the background of particular events. How, for example, would we treat unilateral staff decisions to cease work in sympathy with another "Bloody Sunday" or with the death of a colleague through action by the Security Forces?
6. I am sorry we cannot be more helpful but I think that on reflection you will agree that Mr Baird's proposals could be the first step on a very slippery slope.

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Secretary,

Funeral of Miss Norma Spence - Staff Absence
from work.

N.G.O. ask for endorsement of their proposals
on treatment of non-attendance of Civilian Search
Officers on 2/3/78

This comes within the scope of an instructions
on "Unauthorised absence" - instructions which
we proposed to tighten following the UUC
strike but which are still the subject of
correspondence on detail with P.S.A.

Since "special" treatment would involve us
in judgments on the merits of decisions not
to work, we would propose to hold a fairly
rigid line (i.e. unauthorised absence at
best means either loss of pay or sacrifice
of annual leave.

by Robinson
29/3/78

Mr. Lee - 1/2
We have
decided - this
is in v. unauthorised.
J. G. J. G. J. G.
29/3