

From the Private Secretary

HOME OFFICE

WHITEHALL

S.W.1

7th August, 1969.

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... I enclose a copy of a letter sent to the Home Secretary by Major Chichester-Clark following the telephone conversations I recorded in my letter to you of yesterday.

The Home Secretary has agreed to see Major Chichester-Clark at the Home Office tomorrow morning. Major Chichester-Clark will probably be accompanied by Mr. Porter, the Northern Ireland Minister for Home Affairs, and Harold Black (Secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet).

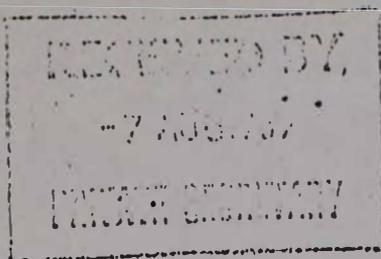
The Home Secretary proposes to rest on the position he took up in yesterday's telephone conversations and to leave it to the Northern Ireland Ministers to make the running tomorrow.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence.

(Sgd.) B. C. CUBBON

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6th August, 1969.

Dear Home Secretary

It was very useful to have our two telephone conversations today about the present situation, and I feel that I now know with more precision your general attitude.

It is, however, the firm and quite unanimous view of the Northern Ireland Cabinet that I must at this stage in our affairs put clearly and unambiguously before you, for the information of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, our attitude to a possible request for Army assistance in Northern Ireland in aid of the civil power and the repercussions of that request. Not to do so at this stage would be to risk a most serious constitutional crisis with the gravest practical implications.

In the first place, may I state our general attitude to the role of the Army here? It is, I must confess, with some irritation that we have read regular Press references to the use of "British troops", as if we were some sort of external territory. The British Army is our Army too. I and many other Ulstermen have been proud to serve in it. It never for a moment occurred to us that its role in relation to Northern Ireland differed in any way from that role in relation to Great Britain.

In any part of the United Kingdom, unfortunate situations may arise - and have arisen in the past - where law and order cannot be maintained by ordinary policing. Indeed to maintain regular police forces at a level to cope with the most exceptional emergencies would represent an appalling burden on the community. For that reason it is a well-understood principle that the civil power, when its ordinary resources are unable to cope with a situation in being or foreseen, has a right to call upon the assistance of the armed forces of the Crown.

We have, of course, always appreciated that the control of troops in Northern Ireland must rest - as indeed it does

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constitutionally under the Government of Ireland Act - with Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. Moreover, we have always acknowledged that, since this is the case, the deployment of troops here in aid of the civil power on any continuing basis would inevitably involve arrangements sufficient to satisfy United Kingdom Ministers that troops were not being affected by situations which they could not influence or control. Accordingly we always foresaw the possibility that you would seek methods by which you could feel confident of a proper voice in the "law and order" field. This, quite frankly, is what my colleagues and I thought you had in mind in the various veiled references which Mr. Wilson and you yourself have made to "constitutional repercussions", and we believe that such arrangements could quite readily be agreed in the context of the normal co-operation between the two Governments.

We were therefore appalled - I must not understate our reaction - to learn that in the event of a deployment of troops, you were proposing at any rate to consider a complete, albeit temporary, suspension of the Government of Northern Ireland. I at once sent my Secretary to the Cabinet to London, and he gathered from your officials that while this extreme course would only be contemplated with the utmost reluctance it could not be ruled out of consideration. However, lobby comment as published in some of today's newspapers has introduced this possibility into the realm of public controversy and debate. The "Financial Times", indeed, went so far as to suggest that our agreement to the suspension of this Government would be a prior condition to any use of troops. It was in these circumstances that I felt it essential to contact you, and as a result I now understand your view to be that while a single isolated use of troops need not involve profound repercussions, any continuing use would lead to your seeking, in consultation with us, arrangements to ensure that you had adequate control over "law and order" issues. You told me that you doubted whether in practice such issues could be hived off from the general responsibilities of Government, although you assured me that you would ask your Office to review the question as a matter of urgency.

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I am bound to say that this situation puts our Government - and in particular my colleague the Minister of Home Affairs - in an almost impossible position. The grave decision as to whether the civil power can no longer cope with a situation ought surely to be made on "law and order" grounds and not on political ones. Yet we could be faced with the unenviable decision as to whether to allow the situation to deteriorate or to seek military aid, and thereby risk extinguishing representative institutions which we have built up and defended for nearly half a century. I can assure you that in any event we would not consider calling in the Army except in the gravest of circumstances; but should these grave circumstances arise, I do not think it is right that the decision should be taken with a sword of Damocles hanging over our heads.

Furthermore, I cannot see what justification there could possibly be for adopting such an extreme course. Since the current difficulties began in October last we have met you and your colleagues in a most co-operative spirit, and in spite of all the formidable political obstacles standing in our way we have moved quite as far as you ever pressed us to do, and indeed further. Indeed, you were kind enough to say today as you did at the last Downing Street meeting that the content and pace of our reform programme was entirely acceptable to you.

Moreover, the recent civil disturbances which led us to contemplate the possibility of a need for troops are not of a political character at all. They are to some extent sectarian, and to an even larger extent sheer hooliganism.

You should be in no doubt that any move to replace a representative Government, freely and democratically elected as recently as February of this year, would be wholly unacceptable to the great majority of Ulster people. You would be taking on a very open-ended commitment, which would go far beyond what would be involved in ordinary aid to the civil power. I must make it clear to you that the people of Northern Ireland are as determined to have their own Government as the people of the South were from 1919 on; and you should seriously consider the history of how Dublin Castle tried to cope with Sinn Fein at

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As matters now stand, newspaper speculation about your intentions - which does not entirely misrepresent your thinking as you made it known to me - could have the most unfortunate effect of encouraging further disorder on the part of those whose aim has always been to overthrow the Government of Northern Ireland. Anyone who seeks that end and who reads¹¹ the newspapers that use of the Army may involve suspension of that Government, is surely going to redouble his efforts to escalate matters to a point where the police can no longer control the situation.

In these circumstances it is my view that we should meet at a very early date to consider the entire situation.

Yours sincerely
James Callaghan

The Rt. Hon. James Callaghan, M.P.,
Secretary of State for the Home Department,
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