

COVERING CONFIDENTIAL

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

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Michael Alexander Esq
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Primi Minister

Prms 4/7

Dear Michael

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH FERMANAGH
WIDOWS : 7 JULY 1980

I enclose a brief for Monday's meeting.

Something that could be raised by these ladies is the possibility of a visit by the Prime Minister to Fermanagh. If it is raised, Mr Atkins suggests that the Prime Minister simply assures the ladies that their kind invitation will be borne in mind. There is no doubt that the Prime Minister would be entering a political battlefield if she were to go. Dr Paisley would claim credit for arranging the visit and would turn it into a personal coup, to the anger of other Unionists (and the OUP in particular).

*Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins*

M W HOPKINS

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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MRS. LATIMER, MRS. KERNAGHAN,
MRS. MORROW AND MRS. HOWE

Line to Take

The Prime Minister will no doubt wish to express her total /of her sympathy with these four widows/ and her Colleagues' determination to rid the Province of the evil which caused their husbands' deaths. She might like also to make the following points:

a) The Government do understand what life is like for ordinary people in Fermanagh in the face of terrorist activity today. Of course they are concerned. It is impossible to provide complete protection to every individual who might be thought to be at risk. But they are doing everything that it is sensible and worthwhile to do, to improve matters.

b) The police and Army are in fact making inroads on the terrorists in Fermanagh as elsewhere. It is of little personal comfort, but there has been much less violence in the county since the early part of this year.

c) The Chief Constable and the GOC decide how best to deploy their men to combat most effectively the terrorist threat throughout the Province. The Government is committed to giving the Security Forces the fullest support in their tasks.

The Prime Minister might also wish to ask the widows whether there is anything that the Secretary of State and his officials could do to improve their personal situation and that of others like them. (We have no evidence to suggest that the system is not working satisfactorily, but the widows might appreciate being asked).

Background

The meeting is taking place on Dr. Paisley's initiative. All four ladies, together with Dr. Paisley and others, have already met the Secretary of State (on 13 June). They are expected to present the Prime Minister with a large number of letters complaining about security in Fermanagh.

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There have been six terrorist murders so far this year which were concentrated in the first quarter (annexed are details of the deaths of the husbands of the four widows). There are still major problems; part-time members of the RUC and UDR, in particular, remain vulnerable to cross-border attacks.

There has been an intensification of the political interest in security in Fermanagh. It appears that this is being orchestrated by certain Unionist politicians. In particular, Dr. Paisley seems intent on strengthening his traditionally slim electoral support in Fermanagh, and there is evidence that he is succeeding. The political exploitation of security in Fermanagh is itself a matter of concern to us: it could give encouragement both to PIRA, and to the Protestants to take the law into their own hands.

In recent months the security forces have stepped up their efforts in Fermanagh. Troop levels in the county were increased substantially some months ago. The police have increased both their mobile capability and their manpower, and have plans to augment their numbers further. They have also been concerning themselves with the personal security of the part-time security forces, providing escorts to and from work, etc. The security forces have closed, and will keep closed, 6 border crossings between Fermanagh and County Monaghan (in addition to the 4 closed earlier this year along that border). 2 more are to be closed shortly (these are not yet public knowledge).

Suggestions have been made lately - and the 4 widows may reiterate them - for seemingly tougher or more dramatic security measures in Fermanagh. These include, for example, "sealing" or mining the border, and deploying large numbers of extra troops to man permanent check points on the border. As noted in the line to take, it is for the Chief Constable and the GOC to decide how best to use their available resources to combat most effectively the threat in all parts of the Province.

The widows may also raise the question of extradition from the Republic, particularly since those responsible for their widowhood are generally believed to be there. The Prime Minister will be aware of the difficulties of extradition. We are nevertheless

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hopeful of more prosecutions of fugitive offenders in the South under the extra-territorial legislation. The Prime Minister will recall mentioning this to Mr. Haughey at the recent EEC Summit in Venice. We have recently followed this up with the Irish, both on the diplomatic net and through the Attorney General's link with his opposite in Dublin.

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