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PRIME MINISTER

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PRIME MINISTER

To see. Mr Ridley is
 visiting Belize and Washington

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Belize

1. The State of Emergency declared by the Governor on 2 April, following disturbances protesting against the Heads of Agreement with Guatemala and Premier Price's constitutional proposals, has been effective in restoring calm. The Governor has relaxed some of the measures imposed but considers that undercurrents of violence and tension could re-emerge. Although the Opposition refused to attend the Constitutional Conference, it went ahead as planned and reached a satisfactory conclusion. No date for independence was set at the Conference, although the Belize Government is urging immediate public announcement that it should be 21 September.
2. The Heads of Agreement have been satisfactorily received in Guatemala where the Government seem to have wide-spread backing for the policy of negotiating with us. They would undoubtedly prefer the date of Belizean independence to be put off until after any Treaty is ratified. We cannot give Guatemala a veto on further progress and must therefore proceed to prepare the way for independence, whatever the outcome of the forthcoming Treaty negotiations.
3. While pressing ahead with independence procedures, we must seek to allay the Belizean Opposition's doubts and fears about both the Constitutional proposals and the Heads of Agreement. We must also ensure that the US are kept fully informed of our progress and are invited to underwrite in some appropriate way any eventual Treaty of Settlement. We need to review the security situation with the Governor.
4. To achieve these objectives, I propose that the Minister of State should visit Belize from 27 April and travel thereafter to Washington. In Belize he would speak to Premier Price and confirm to him that our policy on independence is not conditional on our reaching agreement on the



Treaty. But we need to try to retain flexibility on the announcement of a date for independence and of the date itself in order, on the one hand, not to put the Guatemalans under unacceptable pressure and, on the other, to keep open for as long as possible the prospect of achieving a settlement before independence. With the Belizean Opposition, Nicholas Ridley would explain that the Constitutional proposals which have emerged take account of many of the points which they have made, and are in line with recent constitutions for newly independent territories. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are safeguarded. He would assure them that the Heads of Agreement envisage no cession of territory, nor any diminution of Belizean sovereignty within its existing frontiers, and specifically provide for Guatemalan acceptance of Belizean independence with its frontiers intact. Similarly, Nicholas Ridley would meet representatives of the Public Services Union, the Chamber of Commerce and other bodies to discuss their concerns about the Heads of Agreement and the terms of the Constitution.

5. Nicholas Ridley will also need to assess the strength of feelings inside Belize with regard to independence. He will discuss with Premier Price his commitment to a referendum before independence. If however he is unable to dissuade Price, or if he considers that opposition to independence is likely to persist and possibly take a violent form, he will need to consider with the Governor what precise form any test of opinion might take and what the likely outcome would be. We would wish any test of opinion to address the question of independence "under arrangements made by the existing government" and not be a vote specifically on our eventual Treaty of Settlement - which is essentially an arrangement between the UK and Guatemala.

6. I further propose that Nicholas Ridley should go on to Washington where we hope to arrange a meeting with the



Guatemalan Foreign Minister, ideally with Premier Price present. This would enable us to obtain some idea of how Guatemalan public opinion is reacting to the Heads of Agreement and create a good atmosphere for the negotiations due to open on 20 May to convert the Heads of Agreement into a Treaty. It would also be an opportunity to indicate to the Guatemalans that we may need to proceed to independence for Belize before any Treaty has been ratified, if there are unreasonable delays on the Guatemalan side.

7. In Washington Nicholas Ridley will also be able to bring the US Administration up-to-date on recent developments; to discuss the possibility of US assistance in financing the enhancement of the Belize Defence Force; to seek assurances that they would be prepared to help in underwriting Belizean security after independence, and to ask them to continue to exercise restraint in supplying arms to Guatemala.

8. I shall report further after Nicholas Ridley's visit, and before significant decisions are taken or further announcements made.

9. I am copying this minute to OD colleagues, and also to Sir Robert Armstrong.

23 APR 1961



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