

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



CONFIDENTIAL

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

17 July 1980

Michael Pattison Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

pps all

Dear Mike,

You sent me on 27 June a copy of a telegram which the Prime Minister had received from Terry Carlin of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions, seeking a meeting on the unemployment situation in the Province. You indicated that the Prime Minister would not wish to offer a meeting and asked that we should reply on her behalf.

My Secretary of State has considered this matter with some care, and would like to suggest that the Prime Minister should perhaps after all consider whether she could not manage to fit in a meeting, even though there might be little comfort which she could offer. The sad truth is that the short-term effects of the Government's current economic policies, which are being applied as sternly in Northern Ireland as elsewhere, hit hard in a province which suffers from such longer-term disadvantages as heavy dependence on declining industries, an absence of any indigenous source of energy, and geographical remoteness. This produced in June an unemployment rate of 12.7% (compared with a GB equivalent of 6.7%, and a highest GB regional rate of 9.3%); and there is worse to come - Grundig have recently announced a factory closure in the autumn which will cost a further 1,000 jobs.

All of this produces strong local feelings and my Secretary of State considers that if it is at all possible the Prime Minister should at least find a little time to listen to the worries of the trade unionists. A complete refusal would cause a degree of resentment out of all proportion to its true significance, not only because of the human implications of the current Northern Ireland economic scene, which are serious enough, but because it would feed a sense of the remoteness of direct rule. Time invested in fostering the understanding that the Westminster government does in fact care could be time well-spent.

Mr Atkins therefore hopes that the Prime Minister will feel able to agree to Mr Carlin's request.

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

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