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HOME OFFICE  
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Prime Minister:

The lesson appears to be that civil disorder 22 July 1983  
of the Brixton kind depends  
at least as much on transient factors  
and accident as on underlying  
social conditions.

Dear Tim,

PUBLIC ORDER: PROSPECTS FOR THE REST OF THE SUMMER

The Home Secretary believes that the Prime Minister may wish to be aware of assessments he has received of the public order prospects for the rest of the summer.

The background to this is that, as in 1982, so far this year there has been no extensive disorder such as that in 1981. There have again been lesser disorders, sometimes between the police and - generally young and black - people, and some in areas where tension and disorder has been experienced before. Recent examples include attacks on the police in Brixton on 4 June, in Notting Hill on 20 June, and in Bristol on 21-22 June. I attach accounts of those incidents (two in the form of Written Answers to Parliamentary Questions from Mr Harvey Proctor, MP). The assessment available to us is that these events were not co-ordinated or pre-planned. But incidents of this sort have been borne in mind in the assessments of the prospects for public order provided by the Security Service and key chief officers of police.

As to the rest of the summer, the assessment from the Security Service is that there is no intelligence to suggest that any black or white subversive groups or individuals are planning civil disturbances or that they are considering how they might exploit any disturbances that might otherwise arise. If disturbances were to break out, some subversive groups would be likely to move quickly to extract the maximum political advantage from them. Given the problems of the inner-cities and of areas of high ethnic minority population, and the strained relations in some places between the police and the ethnic (particularly the black) communities, local incidents will undoubtedly occur from time to time. The greatest threat of serious civil disorder involving the ethnic minority communities would appear to arise from a spontaneous hostile reaction to a perceived wrong or a particular incident, leading to violent confrontation with the police. If a major confrontation developed in a particular locality, then sympathetic violence could well follow elsewhere.

Similarly, the assessments from the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and the Chief Constables of Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the West Midlands report no intelligence of planned disorder. In London, there remain a number of areas of tension and potential trouble, including Brixton and Notting Hill. Developments in such areas are constantly monitored and reviewed. The police are engaged in a major planning and liaison operation for the Notting Hill Carnival on 28-29 August, with the aim of ensuring a peaceful carnival, with a low-key presence. The situation in Greater Manchester is stable at present, and there are

/no indications

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no indications of serious threats or difficulties. The same is reported of Merseyside, although the chief constable there regrets that some local political rhetoric speaks of predictions of riots and violence. The recently begun demonstrations about the conviction of (white) Mr Dennis Kelly for the murder of (black) Mr Billy Osu do not at present appear to pose a serious threat to public order, but the position is being monitored very closely, under the personal direction of the chief constable. In the West Midlands, there are slight indications of a marginal increase in the risk of attack on officers patrolling on their own, but otherwise the system for monitoring the potential for disorder provides a reasonably fair prospect. The most serious threat of disorder is from gangs of youths seeking confrontation with the police; their aggression does not appear to be directed against the police. The overall assessment from the police is, like that from the Security Service, that the greatest risk is of a spontaneous outbreak of disorder sparked by a minor incident and with a potential for imitation.

The police have continued with and developed the work on public order which Lord Whitelaw reported in his minute of 29 June 1982 to the Prime Minister, both in their systems for monitoring the potential for spontaneous disorder and techniques for attempting to defuse it, and in their organisation, training, tactics and equipment for dealing quickly and firmly with disorder should it occur.

Like the assessment for last year, therefore, the summary is that the possibility of public disorder this summer certainly cannot be ruled out but that, if trouble occurs, there is a good prospect that a prompt and firm response from the police would enable it to be contained and prevent it from developing into the sort of riots seen in 1981.

I am copying this letter to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Tim Rawsthorne

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22 JUL 1983

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## INCIDENT IN BRIXTON ON SATURDAY 4 JUNE 1983

At 5.33 pm two uniformed officers on foot patrol in Railton Road saw a black man aged about 21 in possession of what they suspected were controlled drugs and arrested him. The man punched one of the officers and ran off, but after a short chase they caught him. The officers were then attacked by a group of 10 - 15 men who kicked and punched them and one of whom inflicted a knife gash on the back of one of the officers. The arrested man was able to escape, and one of the officers' personal radio was stolen by one of the group.

2. The officers had been able to put out a radio call for assistance, and other officers, in a number of vehicles, arrived at 5.37 pm. The attackers had by then run off, and the police, in their search for them, left Railton Road. One officer, who had arrived in an "Allegro" Panda car, pursued the search on foot, leaving his car parked in the Road.

3. A little before 6.00 pm, the police received information that one of the attackers was in Railton Road. A police van went there, and the officers found and arrested the man, who has since been charged with assaulting the officers who made the first arrest, and with the theft of the radio. The presence of the van and the arrest of this man attracted a crowd of about 150 black people into Railton Road and, as the van moved off, some of the crowd threw stones and bottles at it.

4. At this stage, the officers in the van recognised the need to retrieve the "Allegro", but the hostility of the crowd made that impracticable, and the crowd overturned and set fire to the car. The van moved out of Railton Road, and many of the crowd then dispersed quickly. Those who remained committed no more offences.

5. The local Commander had as a contingent measure obtained the presence of six Divisional Support Units in the area, but judged that there was no reason, and that it could be counter-productive, to deploy them together in Railton Road. After a 'cooling off' period, and when the number of people in the Road was down to about 40, at about 7.45 pm he sent in one Unit, who removed the car, without

**E.R.**

incident.

6. At 10.00 pm the Commander held a meeting about the events at Brixton Police Station with the Deputy Chairman of the Community/Police Consultative Group and the Deputy Chairman of the Lambeth CRC, which is said to have been satisfactory; and there was no further disorder during the week-end.

EXTRACT FROM THE OFFICIAL REPORT

WRITTEN ANSWER

THURSDAY 30 JUNE 1983

COL. 104

**Public Disorder**

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis concerning incidents of public disorder which took place in All Saints road, Notting Hill, London, on Tuesday, 21 June, including the ethnic breakdown of the people involved in the disturbances; and if he will make a statement on the contents of the report.

Mr. Hurd: I believe my hon. Friend may have in mind an incident on 20 June. We understand from the Commissioner that at about 3 pm on 20 June two police officers on foot patrol in All Saints road saw a man whom they believed to be wanted on warrant for various offences enter a community centre. They informed the local inspector, who deployed a district support unit nearby and entered the centre and made an arrest. As the arrested man was being taken from the premises, there was a disturbance in which the inspector sustained a head injury which required treatment in hospital. The police estimate that most of those involved in the disturbance were black. Other officers came to the inspector's help and a man was arrested for obstruction. A crowd of about 50 spectators gathered outside the premises, but there was no disorder in the street. At 9 am on 21 June a man was arrested in All Saints road in connection with the assault on the inspector. A sizeable crowd gathered, but the only incident was that one of the crowd spat at an officer and was arrested. The man appeared in court on 23 June and was bound over.

We deplore the injury to the officer, and the action by those who attempted to hinder the police in the proper execution of their duties.

EXTRACT FROM THE OFFICIAL REPORT

WRITTEN ANSWER

MONDAY 4 JULY 1983

COL. 1

HOME DEPARTMENT

St. Paul's Bristol (Incidents)

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable for Avon and Somerset concerning incidents of public disorder which took place in the St. Paul's area of Bristol on Tuesday 21 June, including the ethnic breakdown of the people involved in the disturbances; and if he will make a statement on the contents of the report.

Mr. Hurd: I understand from the acting chief constable that at about 9.00 pm on 21 June two police officers on foot patrol in the St. Paul's area saw a man whom they believed to be driving whilst disqualified. With the assistance of other officers who arrived in police vehicles they arrested the man. These events attracted a crowd of about 50 youths, who attacked the police. The police were able to take the arrested man to a police station, but during the attack two officers were injured by missiles, and one of the officers was detained in hospital overnight. Police vehicles were damaged, including one empty car which was overturned. Later in the night the police righted the car and drove it away.

Following the initial disorder, until 3.00 am on 22 June there were intermittent incidents in the area in which, typically, small groups of youths would gather, throw stones at officers, and then disperse quickly. In addition, eight shop windows were broken, and goods were stolen from three of them.

Altogether, about 70 officers were deployed in the area, 11 more of whom were injured slightly. A total of eight police vehicles were damaged. Three more people were arrested during the night, and a further five people suspected of involvement in the incidents were arrested subsequently. The first man to be arrested has been charged with motoring offences. The others arrested have been charged variously with causing criminal damage, burglary, possession of offensive weapon, assaulting the police and offences under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936. The police estimate that most of those involved in the disorder were black.

I understand from the acting chief constable that for some months the area had largely been free from tension. We share his hope that the actions of an irresponsible minority should not jeopardise relations between the police and the great majority of the local community, who fully support the police in their efforts to maintain law and order.

22 JUL 1988

