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10 DOWNING STREET

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From the Private Secretary

22 November 1985

Dear Peter,

RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE
NEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSIONER

The Prime Minister had a meeting with the New Zealand High Commissioner this morning. Mr. Harland handed over a letter from his Prime Minister, of which I enclose a copy. — See message

The Prime Minister spoke of the support which Britain had always given to New Zealand and would continue to give. New Zealand had a very special place in the hearts of all British people. The fact that New Zealand had been the first to offer support in the Falklands campaign had made a great impression.

The Prime Minister continued that this background had made her all the more upset over the issue of ships visits. This was the first blot on relations between Britain and New Zealand. She knew that the United States was also very offended about the New Zealand Government's behaviour. It simply would not do for the New Zealand Government to say that their door was always open. It was up to them to go and knock on the United States door. Mr. Harland said that he thought his Government was prepared to do this. But one had to remember that the New Zealand Government had been elected on a clear pledge to prohibit entry of nuclear weapons into New Zealand harbours and waters. The Prime Minister said she wondered whether it had ever been made properly clear to the New Zealand people what the implications of this pledge would be. In her view it would have very serious long term effects which would be highly damaging to New Zealand. She doubted whether the New Zealand people understood that their Government would be isolating the country and losing fundamental friends. Mr. Harland said he believed that his Government wanted to mitigate these consequences. The fact was that there was wide support within New Zealand for the Government's policy and threats by the United States to take counter measures only solidified that support. It gave people the impression that New Zealand was being pushed around.

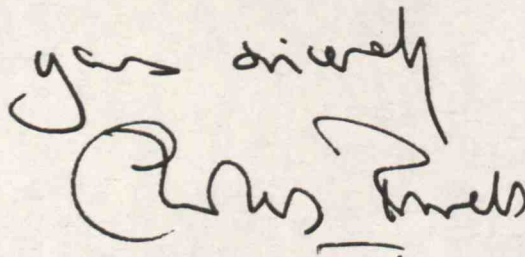
The Prime Minister said that it was monstrous to say that New Zealand was being pushed around. The reality was that New Zealand was trying to push others around. It must take responsibility for the consequences of its own actions

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and not try to shift the responsibility on to others. Mr. Lange could of course do as he liked, but it was he who had taken the initiative in banning nuclear ship visits; and just as he had the right to take his own decisions, so others had the right to decide their reaction. The New Zealand Government's decision would not affect our basic support for New Zealand. Relations between the two countries extended far beyond Governments and policies. But she was in no doubt that the impact was very damaging.

Mr. Harland asked what was the Prime Minister's advice. The Prime Minister said that what New Zealand could not do was to leave it to others to adhere to New Zealand's policy. If they tried to do that, they would not get any ships visiting from Britain or from the United States. Mr. Harland said that the New Zealand Government's proposed legislation would give some room for manoeuvre. His Prime Minister wanted to open the door to a programme of visits. He read out the relevant Article of the proposed legislation. This was to the effect that the Prime Minister of New Zealand might grant approval for a foreign warship to visit a New Zealand port only if he was satisfied that it was not carrying nuclear explosive devices. He thought that New Zealand was making an effort to ease the situation, but it was not getting a response. The Prime Minister said that it did not seem to her that the proposed clause was any help at all. It created an assumption that ships visiting New Zealand ports were not carrying nuclear weapons. She saw no realistic prospect of a solution along these lines, in which case the only thing was to ride out the problem without letting it affect wider relations. Mr. Harland said that he saw some virtue in this: but unfortunately the United States was threatening to end the ANZUS Pact, so that the consequences could not be contained. New Zealand still wanted a negotiated solution. The Prime Minister concluded that such a solution would only be available if the New Zealand Government were significantly to change its policy.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely


Charles Powell

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.