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FROM: R P LEMON
PS/Michael Ancram
24 October 1996

PA-670/96

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
 PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
 PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
 PS/Baroness Denton (DED,DANI&L) - B
 PS/PUS (B&L) - B
 PS/Sir David Fell - B
 Mr Loughran
 Mr Thomas - B
 Mr Steele - B
 Mr Bell - B
 Mr Leach - B
 Mr Watkins - B
 Mr Wood (B&L) - B
 Mr Maccabe - B
 Mr Perry - B
 Mr Gamble, DED
 Mr Haire, DED
 Mr Margetts - B
 Mr Corbett

278/10

Mr Corbett

29/10

Mr Canavan

Mr. Cairns
Mr. Boycott
J. Ke.
S.

29/10

MICHAEL ANCRAM'S MEETING WITH BUSINESS PEOPLE - ECONOMIC BOYCOTTS

Michael Ancram met with representatives from Unionist parties in Castle Buildings on 17 September. At that meeting the Minister undertook to meet with traders and on 24 October at Stormont Castle he met the following delegation of representatives of small businesses:

- Mr Field - Chairman, Business & Professional People for the Union
- Mr Gordon, Secretary of Business & Professional People for the Union
- Mr [redacted] Lisnaskea
- Mr [redacted] Lisnaskea
- Mr [redacted] Pomeroy
- Mr [redacted] Castlederg
- Mr [redacted], Lisnaskea

Mr Maccabe, Mr Canavan and I were also present.

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BB/MOFS/11784

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Detail

2. Mr Field began by giving an overview as seen by him of the current level of economic boycotting. He said some forty businesses across Northern Ireland had been affected, five of these were represented at this meeting. The losses suffered by these five since the beginning of this campaign amounted to about £690k which if projected to the total of forty businesses translates to about £24 million of ^last turnover. Mr Field said that the boycott was a form of ethnic cleansing which targetted businesses with connections with the Orange Order but also others which were not involved either with the Order or the events of last summer. He invited the business representatives to recount some of their experiences.

3. [REDACTED] a petrol station/shop owner, said that his weekly turnover had dropped from £44k just before 12 July to £26k now. [REDACTED] had been accused of manning a roadblock in the summer and spitting in a Catholic womans face. This was untrue. He had previously been threatened by the IRA. He was not in the Orange Order and his workforce was 38% Catholic. He said his business was able to continue only because of the goodwill of his bank manager. The Minister asked [REDACTED] if there was anything he thought could be done locally to help. [REDACTED] was not optimistic but suggested the Catholic Church could be asked to lend their weight to condemn the campaign. He concluded by saying gloomily that the next thing he expected was a bomb.

4. [REDACTED] a grocer and Post Office owner from [REDACTED] said his story was similar to [REDACTED]. He was not a member of the Orange Order and had a mixed workforce but had received an anonymous and threatening letter. The letter had been passed on to the RUC. [REDACTED] said he was particularly sad about recent events because he had been encouraged to extend his premises and was given an IFI grant of £67k to which he had added £260k of his own money. He was therefore in considerable debt.

5. [REDACTED] read out an article from the Newsletter which described boycotting in Pomeroy. He then read

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a prepared statement in which he referred to "intimidation in many forms", Protestant businesses being "cut off from the till", and Sinn Fein/IRA orchestrated campaign involving rumour and intimidation. [REDACTED] described how a campaign of intimidation had driven his customers away from his [REDACTED] business. His [REDACTED] business had suffered to the extent that his father was keeping it ticking over while [REDACTED] himself got another job to pay the bills.

6. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was in the Orange Order and had served loyally in the UDR. To begin with his postal accounts had fallen away, then Catholic customers had stopped shopping at his store, because of rumours being circulated locally that he did not want Catholic custom. [REDACTED] believed intimidation and boycotting was orchestrated by Sinn Fein. He had already had windows broken and a bomb alert. He described how one woman was beaten after it was discovered she bought goods from his store. Although the incident was reported to the RUC, the lady concerned did not press charges for fear of further reprisals.

7. Michael Ancram said that he recognised that boycotting of businesses was a serious problem, and the Government had made clear its condemnation of such action. It was however not easy to say if a stronger line of condemnation by the Government would have been helpful. The Minister's view was that it would not have been - there was agreement from the delegation. The Minister said there was no legal way of dealing with intimidation and economic boycotting. Mr Canavan added that compensation for loss as a result of criminal damage is only payable where physical damage is caused to property. Criminal damage compensation is not payable in respect of loss incurred solely through intimidation per se.

8. The Minister asked if there was any merit in encouraging church leaders to bring pressure to bear on those involved in boycotting. There was some discussion about the contribution which might be made by churches and it was the general view of the delegation that there was more value in local church leaders speaking out than in another statement from the 4 main church

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BB/MOFS/11784

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leaders. The Minister said he would be meeting Archbishop Brady
n and would convey those concerns.

9. Michael Ancram asked if there were any political parties or other organisations which might be encouraged to help. Mr Field said that he was to meet Sean Farren soon and added that he thought Mr Hume could be more helpful. Field had spoken with the CBI who had not accepted the scale of boycotting. Their attitude had been to ignore the problem and it would go away. The Minister said he would talk to John Hume.

10. [REDACTED] raised the role of community associations and the possible misuse of community relations funded minibuses. Mr Canavan said that the Community Relations Council had written expressing their concern and asking for further information. A full investigation into those claims would be made. [REDACTED] seemed reassured that the issue was being addressed.

11. Mr Field asked what these businessmen had to look forward to, was there anything more that could be done? The Minister repeated what he had previously said about the legal position; compensation; the Government's position and his undertaking to talk with Archbishop Brady and John Hume. The delegation accepted there was no further action which could be taken at this stage.

12. As the meeting closed the delegation gave the Minister a video tape purporting to show IRA men taking part in a march to encourage boycotting. This has been passed to SPOB for assessment.

Postscript

13. Today's Irish News (page 6) "Business almost as usual" reports the conclusion drawn by the Federation of Small Businesses is that boycotting was, "dying away".

Signed

R P LEMON
PS/Michael Ancram

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URGENT FAX MESSAGE

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ASST/ SEC 254/10
25 OCT 1996
C.C.R.U.

FOR THE ATTENTION OF

TONY CAHILLAN

FAX NO.

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FROM

G Dale

TEL.EXT.:

PRESS OFFICE
STORMONT CASTLE
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MESSAGE

PAGES TO FOLLOW - COVER SHEET +

1

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