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23rd
~~26th~~ July 1971

Dear Prime Minister,

My colleagues and I are considerably concerned about the continuing deterioration of the situation in the North. We take a serious view of the withdrawal of the Opposition from Stormont.

Our examination of this matter suggests that the decision to withdraw, of which we had no advance information, while directly associated with the shootings in Derry a fortnight ago was more likely caused by a growing conviction among the Opposition that further efforts on their part to contribute to the normalisation of society in the North were fruitless in the face of the increasing signs of a restoration of old-style Unionist authority. While neither of us would wish to go into excessive detail in our correspondence I can understand the view taken by the Opposition to the degree that it appears to be justified by such matters as the following:

- (i) the composition of Mr. Faulkner's Cabinet which includes so many hard-line and sectarian-minded members;
- (ii) the appointment of a minority representative to the Housing Executive who is believed to be in fact the nominee of Mr. John Taylor, Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs;
- (iii) the apparent absence of serious intent to reduce substantially the large number of licensed weapons. This was discussed at Stormont last February and at Westminster last April. The matter is administered by Mr. Taylor who also had responsibility for the issue of licences for large quantities of guns and for gun clubs in the last two years and whose recent remarks give no cause for confidence in his intentions or his judgment;
- (iv) the refusal of the Unionist Party to break their continuing association with the Orange Order;
- (v) the visit of Mr. Faulkner and senior members of his Cabinet to Lurgan at the end of June to confer with leaders of the Orange Order on parades;

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- (vi) confusion about the actual control of parades as between the Joint Security Committee and the local RUC. The Springfield Road, Belfast, parade of 26th June and the Coalisland parade of 12th July are examples;
- (vii) the apparent determination on the part of the Stormont Government to ensure that the Apprentice Boys are allowed to hold a parade in Derry on the 12th August.

These seem to be among the principal things which have discouraged the Stormont Opposition during the past few months and have led them finally to take the step of disassociating themselves from Parliament. I am not in a position to give an exact weight to each of these items; but I am aware also of other charges made such as that concerning the behaviour of the RUC and even of the Courts in relation to the administration of justice which has disturbed the legal fraternity as well as a representative number of influential people in the minority community, particularly in Belfast.

My officials have frequently discussed these kinds of things with yours and I know that there can be differences of opinion about their interpretation. I am also satisfied, however, that responsible minority leaders, who emerged from the civil rights campaign two or three years ago and whose reputation for moderation and a genuine attempt to work the parliamentary system is outstanding, would not have given up easily and must have acted as they have done out of something close to despair.

I am writing to you at this stage to express these considerations so that you will have an opportunity of taking them into account in discussions with your colleagues about the future administration of the North. I look forward to our own meeting in October.

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In the meantime be assured that I am utterly appalled by the increasing violence in the North and greatly worried by the latest developments.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN LYNCH.

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