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RECEIVED 27 NOV 1995 DBL/uz/as

FROM: DUNCAN GILCHRIST
Police Division
23 November 1995

- cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L)* - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (B&L)* - B
- PS/PUS (B&L)* - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Legge* - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Sterling
- Mr May
- Mr Cleland
- * with attachment

1 - Mr Legge
2 - Mr Daniell
1/12

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1. Mrs Collins [CRC 23/11. With some tinkering. It is important that we do not allow Sinn Fein to gain an easy propaganda coup; a path of utter "reasonableness" is the best way of turning this request to our rather than their advantage.]
2. PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B

REQUEST FROM COUNCILLOR ALEX MASKEY FOR A MEETING TO DISCUSS "DISBANDMENT OF THE RUC"

The purpose of this minute is to suggest a moderately constructive response to Councillor Alex Maskey's request for a meeting with the Minister, along with a group of his constituents who have "suffered at the hands of the RUC" to discuss the disbandment of the RUC. The issue obviously requires careful handling.

Background

2. Sinn Fein have already been invited to a meeting with Police Division representatives, as part of the ongoing consultation process approved by Ministers to pave the way for the White Paper. Sinn Fein headquarters have acknowledged, but have yet to reply substantively to, the invitation. Reports indicate that Sinn Fein have been thrown into some confusion over this offer; and it may be that this request from Councillor Maskey is a deliberate attempt to bypass that invitation.
3. The White Paper consultation process carefully differentiated between the constitutional and the fringe parties: the Minister has

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ow met all the constitutional parties except (due to diary difficulties) the SDLP; and officials have met both fringe loyalist parties and the Workers Party, and are due to meet Democratic Left on 28 November.

Handling the response to Mr Maskey

4. The response to Mr Maskey must give no reasonable grounds for complaint, either by Sinn Fein or by other parties. Sinn Fein must not be accorded preferential status, nor allowed to dictate the subject of any meeting. We must try to minimise the risk of headlines that there has been a meeting to "discuss the disbandment of the RUC". Neither can Sinn Fein be given the cold shoulder (tempting though this may be). Mr Maskey's stated intention of bringing a representative cross-section of his constituents to meet the Minister, and his prior notification to the press of his request, is indicative of a desire to stage a media event rather than to contribute constructively to the policing debate; outright refusal to meet him would add to his "grievance pile".

5. The attached draft response (Annex A) attempts to steer a course of complete reasonableness. It has been drafted with a view to it probably being made public by Sinn Fein; draws attention to the existing invitation to the party at Headquarters; and offers to extend that invitation to include Mr Maskey (and his constituents). It makes it clear that the objective of the meeting is to brief Sinn Fein on the policing reform proposals, and to hear their views, but not to enter into negotiation. It also makes it clear that this is part of a process which has involved other parties on the same basis.

6. In view of the probability of further Sinn Fein inspired press comment (and adverse reaction to this from other parties) defensive lines to take are at Annex B.

Signed

DUNCAN GILCHRIST
Ext 27556

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DRAFT LETTER FOR SIGNATURE BY PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER

Councillor Alex Maskey
City Hall
BELFAST
BT1 5GS

REQUEST TO MEET THE MINISTER OF STATE

The Minister of State has asked me to reply to your letter of 13 November, seeking a meeting to discuss the disbandment of the RUC.

As you may be aware, your party has been invited to meet NIO officials, for a briefing on the Government's proposals for reforms to the tripartite structure governing policing, and policing reforms more generally. This is part of the process of meeting interested parties, and hearing their views, in the run-up to publication of a White Paper on reform of policing structures, due to be published shortly.

Although your party has acknowledged this invitation, it has not yet responded substantively.

Accordingly, the Minister suggests that it would be appropriate for that invitation to be extended to include you, and (if you wish) a group of your constituents.

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attach, for your information, copy correspondence to your party headquarters; you will see that the purpose of the meeting is to provide a briefing on current policing reform proposals, and to hear your views on these issues.

If you wish to take up this offer, perhaps you would contact me, so that we can facilitate the necessary arrangements.

PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER

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LINES TO TAKE

1. On disbandment of the RUC:

- RUC has given outstanding service to the community in Northern Ireland, in particular through 25 years of terrorism. See no reason why it should not continue to do so: disbandment is not on the Government's agenda.
- Northern Ireland requires a continuing, professional police service; disbandment of the RUC is simply not a practicable proposal - how would the law be upheld, and citizens protected?

2. On Policing Reforms

- Government is determined to secure, as rapidly as possible, genuine improvement to the police service building on sound principle of policing by consent, impartially and with integrity, effectiveness and efficiency. Its proposals are directed to that end.
- The Government is open to suggestions for taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the peace process for delivering an improved policing service; if anyone wishes to bring forward ideas, they should write to the Minister of State, setting them out.

- The Police Authority have conducted quite possibly the most comprehensive survey ever, open to all, of the public's views on policing, and the Government looks forward to its report.
- Nothing in the current policing reform proposals pre-empts or precludes discussions in all party talks, or further reform flowing from any agreement in them.

3. Name and Symbols

- The name and symbols of the RUC are issues best addressed in all-party talks. The Government is open to suggestions on this issue, should it become clear that a majority in the community in Northern Ireland desire change; it is for the proponents of change to advance convincing and persuasive arguments.

4. Sinn Fein?

- Sinn Fein were invited to receive a briefing from NIO officials on the Government's policing reform proposals. The Party Headquarters have acknowledged the invitation, which is still under consideration by the Party.
- Other interested parties were offered the same facility; most have now availed of it, (still one or two to go - diary problems).

Perfectly prepared to brief Sinn Fein, and listen to their views, on same basis as the other parties. Not prepared to enter any form of "negotiations" with them - have not done so with other parties.

- Would like to hear Sinn Fein's views and proposals on policing. Currently, unaware of anything other than the "disband the RUC" slogan, and the tacit acceptance, (indeed justification), of torture and beatings of civilians from their own community.
- Does not accord with Sinn Fein's portrayal of itself as a party which holds justice dear to its heart: assume therefore that there is more to be said - look forward to hearing it.