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10 DOWNING STREET

7 October, 1985

From the Principal Private Secretary

TOTTENHAM RIOTS

The Prime Minister spoke to the Home Secretary this morning on the telephone about the riots last night in Tottenham.

The Home Secretary reported that the Commissioner had given authority, of which he approved, to the local police for the use of plastic bullets, though in the event they had decided they were not necessary. The Commissioner would tell the press that similar authority would be given when petrol bombs were thrown at the police. The housing estate concerned could not have been worse designed for the maintenance of public order. The Home Secretary had discussed with the Commissioner the use of water cannon, but the Commissioner did not see much value in them in the present situation.

The Prime Minister said that the ferocity of the night's events and the weapons used was evidence of a new situation. Present tactics did not seem to be good enough to deal with it. The Home Secretary was right to make clear the Government's total support for the police. The police should be given all the equipment and personnel necessary. It was a great pity that so few arrests had been made in Tottenham, for example, compared to the 250 arrests which the Home Secretary reported in Brixton. There needed to be a thorough review of the police tactics necessary to deal with the new situation. It might even become necessary to demolish houses in difficult estates in order to help policing. Extra search lights might be employed. Above all, the Government should stand up for the police.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office).

H. Taylor, Esq.,
Home Office.

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