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NOTE OF A MEETING AT CHEQUERS ON 26 JUNE 1977

THE GRUNWICK DISPUTE

PRESENT

Prime Minister
The Lord Chancellor
The Home Secretary
The Secretary of State for Employment
The Secretary of State for Industry
The Attorney General

Mr. R. J. Meadway
Mr. R. M. Morris

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the public order and the industrial relations aspects of the continuing dispute. The Prime Minister had received a minute (copy attached) from the Attorney General setting out his views on powers of the Police to close streets and ban demonstrations.

Public Order Arrangements

The Home Secretary reported the general tenor of the [illegible] arrangements agreed between Mr. Grantham and the Police. However, although arm bands had been issued and more sophisticated arrangements for official marshalling made, a great mass of the crowd present on Friday had refused to co-operate with them. Nonetheless, the Police had had some success in containing the crowd and separating the official pickets from the rest. In his discussions with the Commissioner, he had suggested the Police should consider doing much more to close off surrounding areas and thus deny access to people who were not official pickets. There had seemed some case, for example, for closing down the tube station and trying to move the crowds into an adjacent open space like Dollis Hill Park so that the demonstration could be separated from the actual picketing. The Commissioner, however, had come down strongly against taking such measures. His powers to intervene on that scale were very doubtful and, in any case, such

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measures would only divert his forces, increase the potential points of confrontation, and spread the crowds into the local main roads with consequent serious traffic interruption.

In discussion, the Prime Minister said he still failed to see any logical reason why the Police could not separate the pickets from the demonstrators to a greater extent than hitherto. It seemed the Commissioner had no plans but to continue much as before and that seemed unwise bearing in mind the ugly scenes so far and the possibility that even greater numbers might become involved if Mr. Scargill's threat materialised. The Attorney General said that he had visited the area and could see the Commissioner's difficulties. Keeping crowds right away from the factory would in practice mean cordoning off a very large area and that seemed possible under the present law only when faced with an absolute crisis. Whilst it was possible to consider, the Lord Chancellor suggested, communicating some suitable warning to the unions that massed picketing in these circumstances could amount to unlawful assembly if not riot, it was thought that such warnings would not have the intended effect. The Police tactics so far had been to charge people with the least grave available offences to help avoid escalation.

In further discussion the Home Secretary explained that he had put to the Commissioner the prospect of erecting crowd barriers to help control or separate the crowds. He had also pressed Mr. Grantham to discuss matters with the Police. Although these discussions had taken place, it was the Police view that Mr. Grantham was unable to deliver good behaviour in practice.

Summarising the discussion, the Prime Minister said that people had to realise there was indeed a crisis. If things continued on the present basis there could well be fatalities and in circumstances which might be in danger of bringing the Government down. The fact that Mr. Grantham had been spat at when visiting the site showed that the Government was not dealing with respectable unionism but rent a mob. It followed that the Home Secretary should continue to

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press upon the Commissioner the desirability of reconsidering his tactics. In addition, the Home Secretary himself would do well to visit the site and observe developments at first hand the next day..

Industrial Relations

The Secretary of State for Employment said that, although he had yet to receive a reply to his latest letter from Mr. Ward, he expected him to reject the suggestion of mediation and to base his reasons on the imminence of the High Court action and, perhaps, an alleged doubt about Mr. Booth's capacity to appoint an independent mediator. The position at the Cricklewood depot also gave cause for concern. Notices to staff were already posted there (although the Secretary of State for Industry understood things had not gone quite so far) reminding them of their duty to handle all mail. Further steps by the Post Office to secure compliance with the law would be fraught with all sorts of difficulties. Whilst Mr. Tom Jackson's view was that strike action could be confined, Mr. Booth doubted that assessment. It followed that it was important ways should be explored of supporting the Post Office Chairman's position under the law short of requiring him to intervene in ways that might cause widespread Post Office industrial action.

In discussion, the Prime Minister explored the extent to which Mr. Booth might take the initiative in instituting an inquiry into the Grunwick dispute. Although a Tribunal of Inquiry under the 1921 Act seemed inappropriate, a strong possibility was a Court of Inquiry set up by Mr. Booth. Whilst it could compel the attendance of witnesses, it would have no power to bind the parties to its findings. This latter weakness and the reluctance in any way to compromise the Employment Secretary's role as a mediator had traditionally persuaded the Department of Employment not to set up Courts of Inquiry unless all the parties were agreeable and undertook to be bound by the findings. Although the Employment Secretary's

/scruples

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