

available and in making those resources available, would he take into consideration the partnership that needs to be forged between the police, the local community and local authorities?

Mr. Wardle: That is precisely why the police spending provision will increase next year by 4.4 per cent., precisely why 279 extra police posts have been approved in south Yorkshire since 1979—an extra 10 per cent.—and why, since 1979, across the country we have some 16,600 more uniformed police officers.

Mr. Lidington: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's policy of giving chief officers control over the budgets for police officers and civilian staff will enable those chief officers to deploy resources more efficiently in the circumstances of the regions for which they are responsible?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At present, we have an out-dated system by which police chief officers have to express every bid for extra money in terms of additional uniformed posts. Now, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, chief officers will have the flexibility to decide how they spend their budget.

Operation Cheetah

16. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total cost of Operation Cheetah on Merseyside to date; and whether the inquiry is continuing.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Merseyside police expect the total cost of Operation Cheetah to be approximately £2.2 million. The inquiry is now at an end.

Mr. Parry: Is the Minister aware that the chairman of the Merseyside police committee has expressed concern at the number of hours that have been spent on this investigation? Is the Minister satisfied with the liaison between the Merseyside police and the Crown Prosecution Service?

Mr. Wardle: In that case no doubt the chairman of the police authority will make his feelings known, as I am sure he has, to the chief officer. It is for the chief officer to allocate resources and to deploy officers on operational matters. It must be the responsibility of the police to investigate such allegations.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that wherever there is suspected wrongdoing on Merseyside it is entirely right for the police to investigate it?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is right and that is precisely what the police did.

Departmental Efficiency

18. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the efficiency of his Department.

Mr. Michael Howard: Steps to improve the efficiency of the Home Office and its services include market testing, contracting out, computerisation, better purchasing and greater productivity.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the whole way in which his Department is working now demonstrates the effectiveness of what he is doing and that the new measures which he has announced are exactly what people are looking for?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I am sure that he is right. I am gratified by the widespread support that I have received from the public for the measures that I am putting in place. It is a great shame that the Labour party could not support them on Tuesday.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Gillan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the statement by Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein calling for the clarification of the Downing street declaration is just a sickening attempt by the IRA's apologists to shuffle the responsibility for their evil campaign of terror and fear? Is it not time that they faced up to their responsibilities and grasped the challenge of adopting the democratic path?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend speaks for many millions of people in this country and throughout the island of Ireland. I welcome in particular the recent statement by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), making clear that he sees no excuse whatever for continuing violence and appealing for people to devote themselves exclusively to the democratic process. As the Taoiseach and I have made clear on a number of occasions, the joint declaration is not an invitation for re-negotiation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I have gone to great lengths in this House and beyond it to ensure that the joint declaration is fully understood and we shall, of course, continue to do so. We still await a positive response from the IRA.

Mr. John Smith: Will the Prime Minister unequivocally condemn the gerrymandering and wilful misconduct which has cost £21 million of taxpayers' money in what his party has described as a flagship council?

The Prime Minister: Let me say unequivocally to the right hon. and Learned Gentleman that if the reported allegations about the council turn out to be true, of course I condemn such activities just as I would condemn malpractice in any council, wherever it occurred. It would be wrong to comment on this case while the auditor is still considering it. The auditor operates independently of Government, has full powers to pursue his inquiries and I have no doubt that he will continue to use them to the full. We should wait and see precisely what the outcome may be. Otherwise, we are in danger of assuming that people have committed malpractice until they are proved innocent. I would think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman who is a barrister would recognise that that is no way to pass judgment.

ought not to underestimate the work being done to improve the health service for all the who live in London.

Engagements

Mr. Milligan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Milligan: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the work that is being done in Eastleigh to develop a safer door for trains? Such a lock could have averted some of the deaths which have occurred during the past 20 years when passengers have fallen out of trains. Will the Government encourage British Rail to invest in the new technology which would not only save lives on the railways but would also save jobs in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend may know that British Rail is actively considering the technical feasibility and the cost-effectiveness of the system to which he refers. I know how important the decision is for my hon. Friend, and how hard he has worked on behalf of his constituents. British Rail is examining the matter at the moment.

Mr. Kaufman: On November 10 1992, the Prime Minister, together with the Attorney-General, announced the appointment of Lord Justice Scott to conduct his inquiry. Will the Prime Minister now express his full confidence that Lord Justice Scott is conducting the inquiry particularly since he is due shortly to appear before Lord Justice Scott? Is the Prime Minister confident that he will be treated fairly by Lord Justice Scott? Will the Prime Minister repudiate the scurrilous attack on Lord Justice Scott by Lord Howe?

The Prime Minister: I know that it has been a quite busy House this afternoon, but I seem to recall answering the question a few moments ago. I will reiterate to the hon. Gentleman that the Government appointed Lord Justice Scott to conduct an independent inquiry. It is for him to draw up his own procedures and it is not a matter for the Government to comment on those procedures. I have no adverse comments to make upon his procedures, as I indicated a few moments ago.

Q5. Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continued incarceration of Ron Arad is quite unacceptable? Will he give the House an assurance that the Government will maintain their efforts to secure his freedom?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly give that assurance, and we will continue to support efforts to free Mr. Arad. We have raised the case on innumerable occasions with the Iranians, the Syrians and with any others who may be able to help. On his visit to Israel earlier this month, the Foreign Secretary met members of Mr. Arad's family and assured them that we will continue to do what we can to help. My right hon. Friend gave them our warm sympathy for the pain and suffering which they must feel at present.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Prime Minister give us an assurance today that whether or not the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic proceeds to interpret, elaborate, explain or, indeed, encourage Sinn Fein-IRA to respond to the Downing street declaration, he will stand by it and that he expects members of Sinn Fein-IRA to cease their campaign completely and indicate that they will lay down their arms so that they can enter the democratic process?

The Prime Minister: I certainly wish to see them unreservedly and permanently end violence and then enter into exploratory talks that can lead to them taking part in the democratic process. I reiterate again: we are not in the business of clarifying the declaration. The declaration is clear. What is intended by Mr. Adams in his present activities is to seek bit by bit to draw the Government into negotiation upon the joint declaration. That is not an offer to Mr. Adams now. It will not be an offer to Mr. Adams in the future. If he wishes to enter into discussions, he knows how he may do it. He can decide to give up violence. After three months he can enter into exploratory talks. Then he will be able to enter into the democratic process itself. That is the route ahead. The only question that needs to be asked is not of the British Government or the Irish Government but of Mr. Adams. Will he stop the violence and enter the democratic process or will he not? Everything else is fudge.

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