

PB/85/3/2434/MD

Mr Stephens



cc PS/PUS(B&L) ^{27p}
~~PS/Mr Bloomfield~~
Mr Brennan
Mr Lyon
Mr Coulson

2 SEC/1

PROCESSIONS AND MARCHES

I note from Mr Ward's minute of 27 March that the Secretary of State feels that the RUC's treatment of the AOH march at Portadown on 17 March somewhat changes the climate. From conversation with the Chief Constable late last week, it was clear that he took a similar view. While feeling that the officer-in-charge had perhaps misjudged the situation, he considered that the RUC's refusal to let the marchers past the Loyalist demonstrators carried a clear moral for treatment of the Loyalist march down Obins Street, Portadown, in July, if not more widely.

2. But this was not, I think, a deeply considered opinion, and there is another side to the coin, which the Chief Constable will naturally take into account in formulating policy for the marching season.

3. The officer-in-charge on 17 March halted the parade because he feared he had not sufficient forces present to control the situation if he let it through. Unless Mr Martin Smyth and others can convincingly deliver a better attitude, the moral of 17 March is simple: more precautionary forces. But that is precisely what we don't want, because it is more costly and diversionary of forces from more essential pursuits and because in itself it is likely to inflame the situation.

4. A high degree of reliance will therefore need to be placed on the goodwill and influence of Mr Martin Smyth and the Orange leaders. Whatever views one may have about the extent of his influence, I am afraid that his sympathy for the police /is

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is known to be limited. And 17 March will be seen by rank and file Loyalists, not as pointing the way, but as raising the ante.

P W J Buxton

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