

Sec 1



Secretary of State



Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

ND 22/5

Harold McCusker Esq MP

22 July 1985

Dear Harold,

Thank you for your letter of July 14 about the marches in Portadown on 12 and 13 July.

The decision on routes was entirely a matter for the Chief Constable. As you say, you and some of your colleagues discussed these parades with me in advance, and I passed on what you said to Sir John Hermon. It is important to me that you should feel able to make criticisms and suggestions to me in confidence, and I will respect that confidence. But you cannot possibly have carried away from our discussions the idea that the compromise which the Chief Constable adopted at Portadown originated with the Irish Government or with what you describe as "Republican interests". Indeed, as you will have seen, the Irish Government strongly criticised his decision to allow the church parade through Obins Street on July 7. The Chief Constable took his decision on operational grounds alone.

That decision having been taken, I am glad that leading Orangemen and others advised their supporters, despite their views about the traditional route, against illegal confrontation with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Any other stance would of course have been inconceivable from genuine supporters of law and order. It is certainly a pity that in spite of this advice it proved necessary to deploy substantial forces to ensure that the decision to re-route was upheld on the ground; but the necessity was clear enough. Those who attacked the police deserve the title of hooligans, and I am glad that you condemned them.



You also criticise the tactics of the police. I hope that any specific complaints supported by evidence will be submitted to the RUC so that they can be investigated in accordance with the law.

The events at Portadown on July 12 and 13 have done substantial harm to the Unionist cause. There has been a strong reaction among those in the rest of the United Kingdom who watched the attacks on the police. They ask how the continuing British effort in support of Northern Ireland can be justified when "loyalism" can take such a form, showing a face that could only strike them as repulsive. They of course reject the idea, as I know you do, that the police exist to protect the rights of one community only. I am often asked why I do not ban all such parades.

As you know, I have defended the tradition of parades, and will continue to do so. But I am sure that its abuses must be eliminated if it is not to be a continuing cause of bitterness, disorder, and waste of police resources. The best way to ensure this is for the organisers of a parade to discuss and agree with the police; a sensible route which will minimise the risk of trouble. I hope that those who help to form Unionist opinion will from now on give a clear and unequivocal lead in that direction.

- cc PS/safs (L.B) - T
- PS/PUS (L.B) - T
- ~~PS~~ / M. Bloomfield
- M. Brannon - T
- M. Stephens
- M. Mayfield
- M. Coulson
- Mr. Lyon - T
- M. Reene.
- M. Gilliland
- M. Picken
- M. ...

Y
Lover,
Douglas.