

PA-327/96

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FROM: P JOHNSTON
PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER
20 MAY 1996

23 MAY 1996

UNDER/ SEC 40613
2 MAY 1996
CENT SEC

Mr. Caxson..

for file..

ASST/ SEC 20215
22 MAY 1996
C.C.R.U.

cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas (L&B) - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Clarke - B
Ms McGimpsey - B
Mr Holmes, No 10 - M

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PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) - B

Mr. Caxson
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PARADES: SIR JOHN WHEELER'S MEETING WITH DAVID TRIMBLE MP:
17 MAY 1996

The Minister met with David Trimble on Friday evening to discuss the issue of Parades. Mr Trimble was accompanied by [REDACTED] a Ballynahinch Orangeman, who has been attempting to sound out Garvaghy Road residents about possible compromises. Mr Steele provided official support.

Background

2. The Secretary of State has been kept closely informed of the work of Sir John Wheeler and officials from the Security Directorate on the subject of controversial parades. Sir John and officials have been heavily engaged in recent months with interested groups attempting to achieve a common sense approach (some 20 meetings); however, it is widely accepted that there is no overall panacea and that a sensible approach depends largely on the willingness on all sides to compromise which, in the small number of contested parades, has been notably absent. At a meeting in Downing Street on 7 May, Mr Trimble raised the parades issue; Sir John was subsequently remitted by No 10 to hold further meetings with Mr Trimble and others.

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Summary

3. A meeting in which very significant progress was made. Mr Trimble had come to ask what the Government and the RUC were going to do to enable parades to take place without disorder. Sir John and Mr Steele made several key points which seem to have an important impact on Mr Trimble's position:

- a) the extent of the work which Sir John, officials and the RUC were carrying out;
- b) Sinn Fein's desire to cause confrontation with the RUC and to goad "Loyalists" into disorder so as to give PIRA an excuse to return to violence in Northern Ireland;
- c) emphasised Mr Trimble's unique and pivotal role in selling a compromise, especially at Garvaghy Road.

4. There appeared to be real movement from Mr Trimble who undertook to work actively to sell a compromise to local Orangemen with a view to taking the moral high ground. Mr Trimble also undertook to liaise closely on his approach.

Detail

5. The Minister began by explaining the seriousness with which he regarded the parades issue. He and his officials had been working very hard, meeting various groups, attempting to urge compromise. The Minister had seen no evidence in intelligence assessments that there would be a ceasefire in the immediate future and he feared that PIRA/Sinn Fein would attempt to take advantage of the marching season to provoke Loyalists into giving them the excuse for a return to violence in Northern Ireland. Sir John asked Mr Trimble what he thought could be done to prevent disorder?

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6. Mr Trimble said he felt that we should move away from the situation where the police made a decision at the last moment, on a case by case basis, because this created a situation where those who could get the biggest crowd out won the day. Mr Trimble was keen that the RUC were seen to be thinking ahead, taking a decision in advance on what conditions might be acceptable and communicating these decisions to those involved. The RUC would then have to ensure that crowds were not allowed to gather to create a public order situation which flew in the face of the RUC decision. In short, he would appreciate broad guidelines with a view being taken across the board for a balanced approach which protected the rights of those who wanted to march against those who were opposed to the marching. One idea was that espoused by Ken Maginnis, the UU security spokesman, that all arterial routes should be kept open to parades but Mr Trimble acknowledged that view clashed with the views of some of his Nationalist constituents who were opposed to it; Garvaghy Road was an arterial route.

7. Mr Trimble was very concerned at the scope for large scale disorder and Sinn Fein's part in an attempt to heighten tension over parades. Mr Trimble said the word on the street was that PIRA were briefing the rank and file for a return to violence in Northern Ireland as well as London. The key controversial parades were likely to clash with a decisive period of the talks, providing PIRA/Sinn Fein with its excuse. Mr Trimble's difficulty was that if the RUC continued to re-route controversial parades, then a build-up of re-routing with no indication of any contested parades being allowed to go ahead would create an explosive situation within the Loyalist community. Mr Steele interjected to say that the RUC were well aware of the wider picture and the cumulative effect of re-routing; it was likely, though he could not speak for the police and what events might develop on the ground, that the RUC might be coming to the view that some Ormeau Road parades and the "Tour of the North" (Belfast) should go ahead.

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8. Mr Trimble indicated that he had not become publicly involved in the Drumcree situation. However, [REDACTED] who was accompanying him, had had extensive discussions with the residents of the area. The sort of compromise which might be acceptable to the residents, (though it was not clear whether it would be acceptable to the Orangemen) was as follows; the two parades of the 12th and Drumcree on 7th July might be reduced to one parade (either/or); the size of the parade might be reduced (six abreast?); only local Orangemen should be allowed to march and; there should be no bands. Mr Trimble was urging local officers to discuss the parade with "respectable" members of the area; this had not yet happened but it would be no small event to get the local Worshipful Master to discuss parades in the local Parochial House. Mr Steele suggested that the local Orangemen should do their utmost to demonstrate to the RUC the reasonableness of their position. A compromise, of the sort which was being mooted, sounded very reasonable and the Orangemen, if they accepted it, should go public leaving the onus on others to say why this was not a reasonable position. Mr Trimble agreed but said that he had not become directly involved though he^was due to have meetings with Portadown Orangemen. For the first time ever, he had received a formal invitation to the Drumcree service.

9. Sir John said that Mr Trimble's influence would be absolutely vital if he could use it to sell a compromise to the Portadown Orangemen. Mr Trimble appeared to be, perhaps surprisingly, open to this line of argument; he undertook to speak to local Orangemen and volunteered that since he was not a Portadown Orangeman a condition to keep the parade local would absent him from it. Mr Trimble felt that the absence of a local hate figure on the Garvaghy Road might be a further inducement to the residents. However, Mr Trimble was clearly afraid of being set up as an Aunt Sally if the Orangemen were to agree to what would be fairly stringent conditions only to find the road blocked on the day because a public order situation had developed. Mr Trimble would not have any difficulty with the local residents being involved in non-violent protest at the side of the road but the RUC must stop rent-a-crowd arriving as they were often bussed-in a week beforehand.

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Conclusion

10. The meeting represented very real movement from Mr Trimble who undertook to work actively to sell a compromise to local Orangemen with a view to taking the moral high ground. He also appeared to be prepared to be publicly associated with such a compromise. It is probably too early to be optimistic as success is dependent on:

- a) the acceptability of the compromise to local Orangemen;
- b) the acceptance of that compromise to local residents;
- c) public order conditions which allow the RUC to take the march through providing acceptable conditions can be agreed.

11. Of course such a successful resolution would only apply to Drumcree, but it is potentially the greatest flash-point and Mr Trimble's attitude is in marked contrast to that of last year.

SIGNED

Paul A Johnston
PS/Sir John Wheeler
OAB Ext 6498
20 May 1996

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