



228/11  
22 NOV 1995  
C.C.R.U.

HCS/864/95

FROM: SIR DAVID FELL  
21 NOVEMBER 1995

cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP, B&L) - B  
 PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B  
 PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
 Mr Legge - B  
 Mr Thomas - B  
 Mr Steele - B  
 Mr Leach - B  
 Mr Brooke - B  
 Mr Watkins - B  
 Mr Bell - B  
 Mr Maccabe - B  
 Mr Brooker - B  
 Mrs Brown - B  
 Mr Bramley - B  
 Mr Canavan 22.11  
 Mrs Collins - B  
 Mr Perry - B  
 Mr Stephens - B

*Mr. Cross...*  
*Dr. Price...*

*McConsett*  
*This deep waters down my*  
*earlier version in relation to*  
*the working group. Under former, will*  
*was group, really do in the absence of*  
*the police.*

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

PARADES : REVIEW OF 1995 MARCHING SEASON

1. At the VCR meeting on 13 November 1995 the Secretary of State asked me to prepare a paper, developing my outline proposal for a working group of officials and others to take forward work on this issue. Ministers and officials could then re-convene to resume discussion and discuss the idea.
2. The meeting recognised that the parades issue was multi-dimensional. It is primarily seen as a public order question and the police have registered notable success in recent years in reducing the scope for confrontation during parades: only a small number of parades in 1995 was accompanied by serious disorder. But the nature of that disorder, and the tensions created in communities by the many parades which result in no disorder as such illustrate a key-factor which I believe should guide Ministers' deliberations: viz, that growing success on



the public order aspect of marches will not, because it cannot, resolve the community relations difficulties caused by many marches. In turn those difficulties have a chilling effect on community relations more generally, with, many would believe, a distinct spill-over to political attitudes. While these effects are often observed in relation to Orange marches, not dissimilar consequences can flow from republican marches.

3. Summer has always been a time of heightened sectarian tension in Northern Ireland, but the confrontations in Portadown, Lower Ormeau and Londonderry gave it a strong focus this year. Further, that sectarian tension was also manifested this year in arson attacks on churches and Orange Halls, in intimidation of householders, and in irresponsible comments by community leaders. The spirit of optimism which had persisted from the time of the ceasefires was diminished, and the political atmosphere was soured.
  
4. All of this has created a widespread sense of unease at the working of the current system for managing parades, which has spanned an unlikely range of political and institutional opinion, and extends also into the senior ranks of the RUC. The meeting on 13 November agreed that there ought not to be any significant change to the RUC's primary responsibility for making decisions on re-routing, etc. I wholly endorse that. But I also believe that there is scope for a group of officials in the first instance to draw together the overall experience of the marches/public order interface, to review the community relations dimension, to consider, for example, whether a voluntary Code of Practice might play a constructive role (and if so how and with whom it might be developed), and whether (and if so how) mediation groups might play an expanded constructive role. The group could be chaired by SPOB (since they retain the lead in what is, in significant part, but not solely, a public order issue) and include PAB (because of the



consequential political dimension) and Central Secretariat (because of the community relations dimension). Such a group might, if Ministers agree, find it valuable to consult the Community Relations Council for advice on relevant aspects, including the role of mediation groups. The group would be a source of continuing policy advice to Ministers.

5. The question of RUC participation naturally arises. As I noted at our meeting on 13 November, there are some arguments for this. But I am also persuaded that it would be an extremely difficult and sensitive task to convince the RUC that their representation on the group could be achieved without compromising the Chief Constable's operational independence. But there may be a less hazardous means of securing an RUC input to the exercise. If the group was to be confined to the officials mentioned in para 4, it could from time to time put policy ideas and advice to Ministers, and where appropriate, Ministers might decide at that point to engage the Chief Constable in discussion through existing mechanisms such as SPM. Some issues could be settled in that forum, but where it became clear that a further examination of ideas discussed in SPM was worthwhile, it would be possible for the Secretary of State to suggest, in a natural manner, a debate between the Chief Constable's nominated representatives, and the official group. But such an outcome is by no means essential to the establishment of an internal official-level group now, which, I think stands on its own merits.
  
6. I continue to believe that there would be merit in a group of officials exploring ways of ensuring that the remarkable achievements of the RUC in containing most of the public order dangers are built upon, and in a sense safeguarded by, what I consider essential steps to make similar inroads into the community relations dangers. For, without such parallel progress, I fear (in common with many others) that we will



prove at best to have reached a plateau, and that marches will continue to poison stable relations between the communities and dampen prospects for political development.

7. Lastly, like Mr Thomas, I hope that, when we reconvene to discuss these issues, we can revisit the possibilities also of a political initiative, as suggested in Mr Steele's earlier paper. It might be that the internal working group suggested above could undertake work which could prove useful in preparing any approach to the parties. I do not regard the options as mutually exclusive.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Fell".

DAVID FELL