

ASST/ SEC 43/3.  
MAR 1996  
C.C.R.U.

*Mr Conlon*

S. 13 / 3..

FROM: SIR JOHN WHEELER  
4 MARCH 1996

*Mr. Casos..*

*Don J. A..*

S. 13 / 3..

- cc: Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
- PUS (B&L) - B
- Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Brooke - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr **Canavan**

Secretary of State (B&L) - B

(6.7)

PARADES

All the indications are that this year's marching season will again be difficult. The problems centre on last year's troublespots - the Ormeau Road in Belfast, Garvaghy Road in Portadown, and Londonderry: Duncairn Gardens in North Belfast could also be a flashpoint. A list of contentious parades is at Annex A.

2. The RUC, assisted by mediation groups, continue their efforts to achieve a compromise between the various interests. The signs, however, are not encouraging. Although only a tiny minority of parades are involved, the scale of any disorder could be significant: last year, for example, both sides were prepared to call on reinforcements from outside the immediate area, and to organise parallel demonstrations elsewhere in the Province. The RUC are training an additional 40 MSUs, and the Army are also carrying out public order training on a contingency basis: military involvement would clearly be a retrograde step. The impact of sectarian clashes on the political process, on community relations and on the image of

the RUC could be far-reaching, and there remains the possibility that the Chief Constable could seek a banning order for one or more of the parades.

3. These consequences are clearly highly undesirable. While accepting that the difficulties in particular localities reflect deep-rooted tensions, and that local attitudes are influenced by the political atmosphere more widely, I am clear that Government must do what it can to ease the situation between now and the marching season. I see such an initiative comprising a number of interlinked elements:

- (a) Operational. The policing of individual parades is of course an operational ~~a~~ matter for the RUC, but it does spill over into public policy questions. Consequently we will wish to keep closely in touch with their thinking, both on their approach to particular parades, and on issues such as the timing of decisions to re-route (a cause of some controversy in the past). We will also wish to be sure that the Chief Constable is satisfied that he has the resources he needs to deal with the situation. Regular updates in SCM and SPM are the best way of achieving this.
  
- (b) Political influence. I believe that the RUC's efforts to encourage compromise at local level could usefully be reinforced politically at Ministerial level. I intend to undertake a series of unpublicised meetings with key figures in organisations such as the Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys, and with other community leaders who might be able to bring influence to bear. Martin Smyth in his capacity as leader of the Orange Order of Ireland as well as MP for South Belfast, along with Ken Maginnis in his capacity as security spokesman for the UUP are obvious

key figures along with the leader of the Apprentice Boys in Derry. I also envisage meeting with prominent church leaders who may exercise a restraining influence. To this end PAB will undertake further work to identify these people. It would also be helpful if you and Michael Ancram, as part of your regular contacts with political parties, church leaders, councils and others, were to reinforce the need for compromise and mutual respect if the parades issue is to be successfully defused. You might also consider making these points publicly in a speech, if a suitable occasion can be identified closer to the start of the marching season, and to express support for the RUC in carrying out their difficult task. PAB recently recommended that Michael Ancram accepts an invitation to address a meeting of the Portadown Ulster Unionist Association in May. This would be the sort of opportunity envisaged to put across the message emphasising the need for compromise and the mutual respect for the conflicting views on this issue.

- (c) Party leaders. The party leaders, especially David Trimble, have an important role to play. Trimble as well as Ian Paisley had a direct role in the Dumcree confrontation last year and spelling it out directly to both may be influential in an attempt to prevent a similar situation arising this year. In the same context, Hume could be important in preventing confrontation at the Apprentice Boys marches in Derry. An approach from the Prime Minister in the course of his regular bilaterals might be helpful here.
- (d) Mediation. The efforts of groups such as Mediation Network and the Quakers at local level continue: officials are in touch with them and will do what they can to help.

Work by other groups, such as the Community Relations Council's proposed voluntary code of practice, and the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community (LOCC), which recently put forward a set of specific proposals for handling parades, may also have a role to play.

4. With the first contentious parade on the Ormeau Road only 6 weeks away, we need to take all this forward as quickly as possible. If you agree, therefore, I will begin setting up the meetings suggested in para 3(b), and officials will continue to work up the other elements of the package as a matter of urgency: further advice will come forward shortly.

5. I stand ready to discuss, if you wish, but as we have a very busy schedule ahead of us, I propose pressing ahead with these ideas as soon as possible.

Signed

JW