

Media Issues *NC/44/6*

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*Mr. [unclear]
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FROM: F S WOODS
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PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O

WEEKLY INFORMATION BULLETIN: 23 JUNE - 29 JUNE 1997

Prospects for the week

At the time of writing media are speculating on the prospect of a Prime Ministerial **statement on Sinn Fein** and whether the train will leave without them. Expectation is largely of a firm line from the Government but the picture has been complicated by speculation that the statement was delayed at John Hume's request to win time for **further efforts to get a ceasefire.**

Remarks by the Prime Minister in the USA may result in further interest in the **entry of Sinn Fein to talks** and timescales.

In the midst of uncertainty over train timetables and the joint **paper on decommissioning**, the plenary session of the talks on Tuesday will be the focus for close media attention.

The finding of a bomb under a Sinn Fein councillor's car once again raises the question of **continued Loyalist participation**, and some media are making increasingly cynical informal comments about this.

As the week progresses efforts will intensify to try to **find accommodation** between the Loyal Orders and Residents Groups, particularly those in Portadown. Media attention will be similarly intense and is likely to reflect increasingly the very gloomy feelings we are hearing from journalists and a concentration on potential clashes.

Anticipation of violence ensuing from parades and the possibility of further paramilitary violence may lead to questions on security policy and preparedness.

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As **decisions on routes** for various parades begin to filter through, media will be chasing reaction from the Loyal Orders, residents and politicians. Many will also be trying to anticipate police and political reaction to the spate of applications for marches by the Orange Order in Belfast. Some commentators may return to the question of the **timing of an announcement** on the Drumcree route.

The Report by **SACHR on Employment and Equality** will be made public on Thursday.

A visit and meeting with Ulster Farmers' Union on Tuesday may result in further stories/speculation about the **ending of the beef ban**.

Additionally, a number of key announcements/events may arise during the week, but either are uncertain or have no fixed date -

- handover by the Irish of their dossier on Bloody Sunday;
- tabling of a decommissioning paper agreed with the Irish;
- statement by the Prime Minister covering the current state of play and the way ahead;
- Government-led proximity talks with representatives of both sides in the parades/marches issue.

Lines to take on all of these will be circulated in due course.

Opportunities this week

A substantial programme of *events is currently scheduled, providing a variety of doorstepping and speaking platforms in Northern Ireland and Great Britain throughout the week.

On Monday morning the round of *discussions on the Parades issue continues in Derry with the **Bogside Residents'** Group and a large media turnout can be expected. Later in the day a *meeting with NICICTU could result in comment from participants, as could a meeting with the DUP

A very busy day on Tuesday will include:

- *meeting with the Independent Loyal Orange Institution (tbc);
- *a media breakfast (tbc) which will provide the opportunity to **talk off the record** to some leading opinion-formers;

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*visits to the Millennium Exhibition and Ulster Farmers' Union (tbc) could provide doorstep opportunities; there may be interest in the Government's intentions for matching funds for the Odyssey project;

attendance *at the Talks plenary on Tuesday will offer opportunities for **doorstep interviews and a possible statement** on the decommissioning paper;

*a speech at the Exporter of the Year Awards, which could be used to reinforce **the need for calm** this summer from the business point of view.

On Thursday there will be an ***address to the Foreign Press Association**; debates in the House on the **Direct Rule renewal** and **Appropriation** also offer platforms for delivery of specific messages.

There is a doorstep opportunity on Friday with a *visit to a Lurgan school. A speech on **raising school standards** would also provide an opportunity to comment on the **political or security spheres** if required. Media might read some significance into the choice of venue. Further doorsteps could be undertaken at events presently scheduled for Belfast and Limavady later in the day.

KEY THEMES

Political

The Government's objective in Northern Ireland is to facilitate reconciliation and a fair and long-term political settlement which will bring lasting stability and which will have broad support on both sides of the community. The principle of consent will be the key principle in the Government's policies on Northern Ireland. We will work to this end in close co-operation with the Irish government.

The people of Northern Ireland have the right to decide their own future and any settlement must be negotiated, not imposed. There will be no change in the status as a part of the UK without the clear and formal consent of a majority of the people who live here.

The Government is committed to achieving greater openness and accountability. We will listen to the views of the people and their political leaders, and we will create, through discussion, new institutions which fairly represent the interests and aspirations of both communities.

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Current issue lines

Officials/Sinn Fein Meetings

Meetings between officials and Sinn Fein were subject to events on the ground. Following the murder of the 2 police officers, no question of our agreeing to any further meeting.

The purpose was to clarify our position and to assess whether the Republican movement is ready to give up violence and commit to politics alone.

We were not negotiating with Sinn Fein and these contacts were in no way "parallel negotiations".

Ministerial contact with Sinn Fein representatives

Ministers will not meet Sinn Fein delegations while there is no IRA ceasefire, but they will not be deterred by the presence of Sinn Fein representatives from attending public functions or meetings to carry out their Ministerial duties. In the interests of their constituents Sinn Fein elected representatives will continue to be engaged at official level in consultation exercises and other functions.

The Talks Process

We believe that real progress can only be achieved through political dialogue. We are determined to sustain the momentum of the multi-party talks and to ensure that these negotiations achieve their potential.

Sinn Fein entry "in 6 weeks"

The Prime Minister is committed to carrying the process forward with or without Sinn Fein and he expects to say how within the next few days. Sinn Fein know that what is required is the ceasefire which everyone wants.

Participation

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We want these negotiations to be all-inclusive. The way is open to Sinn Fein but only if there is an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, borne out by words and deeds. No-one can combine terrorism and democracy. If the IRA campaign continues, the talks must and will move on without Sinn Fein.

Loyalist ceasefire

Total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell Principles is an absolute requirement for participation. The CLMC ceasefire is still formally in place, but the words of a ceasefire declaration are meaningless unless reflected in deeds. We will not hesitate to take action if we feel any party has demonstrably dishonoured these principles.

Timeframe

Our target is to complete negotiations by end May 1998 (the period envisaged in the Entry to Negotiations etc Act and the point at which the Forum will cease to exist). A referendum can be held at any time up to May 1999.

Substantive negotiations will therefore need to start this autumn; to achieve that, we are determined to facilitate a resolution of the difficult and sensitive issue of decommissioning within the next few weeks.

Resolving Decommissioning

The decommissioning issue needs to be resolved to the satisfaction of the Talks participants and we believe they will be able to find a resolution.

We are working with the Irish Government and are close to agreeing with them a set of proposals which could win widespread support, taking account of the positions of the participants.

We hope to present these to the other participants for consideration as soon as possible.

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Security

The Government is committed to upholding democracy and the rule of law; terrorism from whatever quarter will not succeed. We fully support the security forces, and will work with them to deal with the men of violence and to maximise support and confidence throughout the community.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms the murder of two policemen in Lurgan, as we do all other acts of violence, intimidation and harassment. No effort will be spared in finding those responsible and bringing them to justice.

We urge restraint on those who might think of retaliation, and hope that calm will prevail.

Security forces in Northern Ireland remain on high alert to deal with threat, from whatever source. Vigilance and skill of security forces continues to prevent terrorists from causing even greater misery and suffering.

Current issues lines

Parades

We believe that the way to reduce the tensions and difficulties surrounding parades is through dialogue and negotiation leading to accommodation at local_level. This is not a question of denying anyone's rights but of reaching an acceptable balance. Everyone with any influence should use it for reconciliation, not confrontation.

The Government, the RUC and Parades Commission will do everything they can to prevent disorder and conflict and uphold the rule of law. The Secretary of State and officials will continue intensive discussions with all the relevant parties in the coming weeks, to strengthen and build on common ground. If agreement cannot be reached, any protests must be peaceful and give no opportunity for extremists to exploit.

We will continue to implement the recommendations of the North Report carefully and sensitively.

Decisions

If absolutely necessary there are a variety of powers available to the Chief Constable and the Secretary of State under the NI (Public Order) Order. That situation has not

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been reached, and we very much hope that local accommodation will be reached; we are engaged in a comprehensive round of discussions to that end.

Harryville

It is very sad that the decision to suspend Saturday mass had to be taken. However we welcome any development in this long-running situation which may help reduce tension and make lives easier at a difficult time.

Confidence Building

We will seek wherever possible initiatives to build confidence throughout the community by, inter alia - expanding and reinforcing the protection of individual rights; reforming policing; ensuring equality in employment; and enhancing employment opportunities.

These measures will threaten no-one and reflect sound principles which should underpin any fair minded society.

SACHR Employment Equality Report

This is a comprehensive review which we welcome. It deals with complex and important issues which Ministers will consider carefully.

Beef Export Ban

We recognise the serious effect of the BSE crisis in Northern Ireland. We are pressing hard for the lifting of the export ban; this remains paramount, and we are pressing for it to be done at the earliest opportunity.

(Signed)

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