

C O N F I D E N T I A L



From: P Smyth  
Political Affairs Division  
13 March 1997

cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B  
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Sir David Fell - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Leach - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Wood (B&L) - B  
Mr Perry - B  
Mrs Collins - B  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr ~~Caravan~~ - B 18.7  
Mr Buchanan - B  
Mr Webb - B

*PA - 24/6/90*  
*18/3*  
*Mr [unclear]*  
*Mr [unclear]*

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

**MEETING WITH GRAND ORANGE LODGE OF IRELAND: FRIDAY 14 MARCH**

I spoke on Tuesday to George Patton, the Executive Officer of the Grand Orange Lodge, about the forthcoming meeting with the Secretary of State.

Background

Those attending the meeting will be Robert Saulters, the Grand Master of the GOLI; John McCrea, the Grand Secretary; Denis Watson, the Worshipful Master of Armagh County Grand Lodge; and Mr Patton himself. Apart from Mr Saulters, the Secretary of State has met the other delegation members at previous meetings. The main object of the meeting is to discuss the response of the GOLI to the North Report; but given the involvement of some of the delegation members in the developing situations at Garvaghy Road and Harryville, it can be assumed that the discussion will not be confined to the theoretical aspects of North.

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Messrs Saulters, McCrea and Patton met with Sir John Wheeler on 10 February for a general review of the prospects for the forthcoming marching season. This was a generally amicable encounter, although Mr Saulters did put down a marker that his public response to North would be critical. (Mr Patton informed me that he has just forwarded a synopsis of the official GOLI response to the North recommendations. When asked why we were to receive a synopsis rather than the full response, Mr Patton replied that the full list of Orange objections to North was too bulky to be easily handled! Mr Webb is presently undertaking an analysis of this response, and will submit it separately.)

Nevertheless, there is little reason to assume that the meeting will be entirely negative. Mr Saulters is on the record as believing that mediation should be used to resolve contentious parades; and at the meeting with Sir John Wheeler, he expressed the view that the risks associated with the Orange Order speaking directly to McKenna in Garvaghy Road might be worth taking in order to call the bluff of the local Residents' Association. This decidedly forward view ties in with the strong personal stand that Mr Saulters has taken in regard to publicly supporting the Roman Catholic worshippers at Harryville. Mr Watson, too, has gone public on the need to avoid a repeat of last year's scenes at Drumcree, and in the two meetings he has had with the Secretary of State has strongly emphasised his wish to see conciliation achieved if at all possible.

Handling

The extent to which such opinions are shared within the Orange Order at all levels is unclear; but their being held at all does provide an opportunity for the Secretary of State to use the meeting to encourage Mr Saulters to explore every possible

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avenue in an effort to avoid a re-run of last year's scenes. Given the atmospherics at Monday's meeting with Harold Gracey and his colleagues, and the fact of the Sinn Fein involvement in residents' associations revealed by the recent "Prime Time" programme, it seems doubtful if Mr Saulters and his colleagues will readily acknowledge the necessity of face-to-face discussions with McKenna and his like; but the virtues of using mediators in such circumstances might be further reinforced.

If the experience of other meetings is any guide, it may be helpful for the Secretary of State to give an early and unequivocal reassurance as to the role (or non-role) of Maryfield in decisions about banning parades. In that context, it might be worth considering whether anything could be said, without breaching the provisions of confidentiality, which would give the Orange delegation a flavour of Wednesday's IGC discussion of the issue - given recent media coverage of the Dublin Conference it is certainly something they will have at the forefront of their minds.

It may also be useful to take the views of the delegation on the veracity of recent reports of Loyalist extremists using the Harryville standoff as cover for attempts to co-ordinate the activities of all those opposed to any compromise on the parades issue. Joel Patton and the Spirit of Drumcree group are rumoured to be behind the formation in Ballymena of the County Antrim Orange Support Group, one of whose objectives is to oppose any negotiations with residents' associations. There are unconfirmed reports of similar groups being established elsewhere. The possibility of Portadown and Ormeau Road hardliners covertly using such groups must be of concern to Mr Saulters and the responsible leadership of the Orange Order. The views of Mr Saulters on the strength of hardline opposition within the Order might be informative.

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Overall, while the delegation is unlikely to display anything but opposition to the North proposals, there is no reason to anticipate a display of overt and aggressive hostility. The Secretary of State may wish to use the meeting to establish personal contact with Mr Saulters, and in the course of exploring the salient issues, reiterate the possible benefits of local negotiations as a way round the blockages.

[signed PS]

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