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From: PS/Secretary of State
12 July 1996

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cc: PS/Secretary of State (L) - B
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PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Ray - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Hill - B
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Mr Budd, Cabinet Office
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HR
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the

Mr Steele - B

THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH JOE HENDRON MP

Joe Hendron MP, accompanied by Alastair McDonnell (former Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast) and Martin Morgan (currently leader of the SDLP group on Belfast City Council) came to Hillsborough at about 1 am this morning to see the Secretary of State to express their grave concerns about the aftermath of the Garvaghy Road march and the prospects for the Ormeau Road on 12 July.

Joe Hendron, as ever, was extremely reasonable and full of apologies for disturbing the Secretary of State so late at night but could not conceal his very real agitation at how the Garvaghy Road march had been perceived and the likely reaction to the Orange Order being allowed to march down the Ormeau Road. He appreciated the point about the operational independence of the Chief Constable but said that ultimately the Secretary of State was in charge in Northern Ireland and he had to consider what would be happening as a result of all this.

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Martin Morgan was a little less friendly and had a slight tendency to lapse into Sinn Fein-style lecturing rather than debate. He is particularly strong in North Belfast and, I understand, a protege of Alex Attwood (and it showed). He made very general points about real worries of the nationalist community in Belfast and elsewhere and their perception that they were not being treated fairly. (The Secretary of State's protestations about the draconian fair employment legislation and other safeguards that exist in Northern Ireland were brushed aside.)

McDonnell was extremely reasonable and very friendly but was specifically concerned about the Ormeau Road. He could understand, and indeed even tolerate, what is described as the 'ring of steel' thrown around the area which he appreciated had to be there to allow the police to keep their options open. But the blocking of the small side streets by police landrovers had been a gross over-reaction by the police. He and Hendron had made this point and others to Blair Hall and ACC Belfast (Bill Stewart) at their previous meeting.

McDonnell said that if the march did go through (and the impression I got was a resigned acceptance on his part that it probably would) this would force the SDLP to become more 'belligerent'. Morgan picked up this theme in a late intervention when he said that in such circumstances, the SDLP would need to 'draw back and review its position'. Hendron interceded rapidly at this point to say that there was no question of the SDLP pulling out of the Talks process. (Comment: this is important and reassuring, though it would be nice to hear something similar from Mallon.)

The Secretary of State listened to all this very carefully and made the usual points about the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the appalling dilemma he had been faced with at Drumcree, including the risk of loss of life if 50-100,000 Orangemen had turned up at Drumcree, as was entirely possible, and had over-run the police and Army lines there. He expressed his personal exasperation with Orange marches as a whole and the disproportionate

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effect they had on the political situation in Northern Ireland. He also said that ultimately the failure at Drumcree had been the inability of the two local groups to get together. The fact that the overwhelming majority of marches and parades passed off entirely peacefully, indicated that it was possible to find ways of avoiding them becoming points of confrontation. He also repeated the point he had made at Question Time on the need for a review of the whole parades issue with an independent element. This was received reasonably positively by Hendron and his colleagues.

The Secretary of State said that he did not know what would happen on the Ormeau Road on the following morning. But he appreciated the points made about the police presence and undertook to pass them on. (This was done at 7 am today in a phone call between the Secretary of State and Bill Stewart.)

Comment

The meeting was very amicable and the Secretary of State believes it was helpful to have seen Dr Hendron, so that at least the latter could say that he had had an opportunity to express his views. (Hendron had made the not unreasonable point to me earlier, when seeking this meeting, that Trimble, Paisley and McCartney had got to see the Prime Minister on the issue of Drumcree and the Garvaghy Road.) It will be important to keep the SDLP on side as far as possible at a time when the nationalist community is feeling very bruised indeed by what they see as an RUC and HMG capitulation to Orange mob rule.

(SIGNED)

MARTIN HOWARD

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