

CONFIDENTIAL

File
John S/7

From: John Holmes

Date: 8 July 1996

PRIME MINISTER

DRUMCREE MARCH

Paddy is being silly
- this is difficult.
A. He has

Following your discussion with Paddy Mayhew at lunchtime, I asked Trimble and co. to call on Paddy. Trimble was not keen, but agreed to do so. The meeting took place this evening, involving Trimble, Paisley and Smyth. ✓

The meeting was long, reasonably friendly, but inconclusive. The Unionist leaders appeared shaken by the circumstances they found themselves in, and did not rant and rave. They argued that serious trouble lay ahead if a solution was not found by Friday. But they did not seem inclined to show leadership themselves to avert this. ✓

They complained about police behaviour, said that they wanted a period of calm to allow the two sides to come together, but had no proposals to offer other than to press for the RUC to let the march through. On a specific point, they said they were unable to persuade the Portadown Orangemen to talk to the Garvaghy Road Residents Association, because the latter were led by an ex-terrorist, Brendan Mackenna. ✓

Paddy Mayhew listened to what they had to say, but made clear that he fully backed the RUC. He also tried to get across that the situation the Unionists found themselves in was one of their own making. He nevertheless arranged a further meeting this evening between the three and the RUC Deputy Chief ✓

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Constable, and made suggestions about how to get round the local unwillingness to talk.

Further trouble is expected tonight, in particular Unionist efforts to block the roads, including the road to Belfast airport. There is also the possibility of confrontation in some of Belfast's sensitive areas. In general, there is a good deal of gloom about the prospects. Meanwhile the Unionists have said they will not attend the Belfast talks while the stand-off continues, although it is not clear whether this is a formal boycott.

The RUC are in touch with both sides, as are various mediating organisations.

The RUC view is that, while the situation is indeed serious, there is also an element of theatre. The situation will need to get hotter still, with more theatre, before the two sides are ready to sit down and work out a solution.

Immediately after the meeting with Paddy Mayhew, Trimble rang me to renew the request for a call on you tomorrow afternoon. I said that I would be in touch tomorrow morning about this.

Paddy Mayhew spoke to me subsequently. He remains very opposed to such a meeting: you cannot say more about the RUC position than he has already said. If you do say anything more, that could undermine both him and the RUC. He repeated what he said to you at lunchtime, that this is a confrontation the RUC have to win. He is prepared to give them all the resources they want. He may call for the Third Army Battalion to be deployed to Northern Ireland soon.

We will need to look at this again in the light of events overnight. But I do not think it is sensible to refuse to see Trimble and Paisley, despite Paddy's views

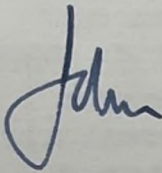
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(which are not shared by his officials). They have seen Paddy for a serious meeting, but still want to see you. They will go on demanding to see you as the week goes on. It will be better to see them now to make clear that you have no magic solution, rather than getting into a needless confrontation about whether you are willing to talk to them.

I therefore recommend that you agree to see Trimble, Paisley and Smyth with Paddy, after PMQs. There is a 30-minute slot at 1545. But you may have to have another word with Paddy yourself in the morning to persuade him that you see no alternative, and to reassure him you will not undermine his position.



JOHN HOLMES

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Stop press: Paisley rang to say that he wanted McCartney to come too, but Trimble might object. If he did, Paisley would want a separate meeting with you, with McCartney. McCartney then spoke to me to repeat all this. I made clear that no meeting was yet agreed. If it was, it would obviously be much easier if all came together, but we could discuss all that in the morning. In practice I could urge Trimble to agree to one delegation - otherwise only 15 minutes each!

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