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FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY I A L



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

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cc - EO

JH

Bup.

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AZ

17 July 1996

Dear John,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH DR ALDERDICE: THURSDAY 18 JULY 1996

The Prime Minister has agreed to meet Dr Alderdice in the House of Commons at 3.40pm tomorrow.

Judging from his conversation with you on 12 July and by his comments during his bilateral meeting with the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram on Tuesday Dr Alderdice will be in a grim and gloomy mood. The meeting is likely to focus on the lack of confidence among the nationalist community and also many protestants, in the Chief Constable and the RUC following Drumcree, together with the undermining of the talks process by the actions of the Unionists, particularly David Trimble.

OBJECTIVES AND HANDLING

At the meeting, the Prime Minister might therefore aim to:

- listen to Dr Alderdice's views;

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- show understanding of the depth of feeling by both the nationalists and liberal protestants;
- confirm the Government's belief that a settlement is possible;
- reaffirm the Government's commitment to the talks process;
- persuade the Alliance Party to continue to engage constructively in the negotiations.

The background to Drumcree was set out in my letter of [yesterday] which provided briefing for the Prime Minister's meeting with the SDLP.

POLICING

Dr Alderdice considers that by reversing his original decision at Drumcree, the Chief Constable was saying that the rule of law cannot be enforced in the face of the Orange Order and that the RUC would prefer to stand up to the nationalists rather than Unionists. The result has been a complete loss of confidence in the RUC by the nationalist community, and he would find it difficult to argue against any future nationalist demands for greater Dublin involvement in Northern Ireland, to protect their interests. The only way to restore confidence would be to remove the Chief Constable from his post.

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TALKS

Dr Alderdice also believes that by their actions the Unionist's (both UUP and DUP) have entirely wrecked the Talks process, and have clearly breached the Mitchell principles of democracy and consent by their failure to oppose the threat or use of force by others. He has alleged that Mr Trimble's meeting with Billy Wright, a known loyalist paramilitary who has not noticeably supported the loyalist ceasefire, is evidence of a conspiracy to undermine the leadership of the UVF because it is too liberal. But he did admit that Mr Trimble had the support of 80% of the protestant population. Dr Alderdice also believes that the Unionists' activities have undermined the arguments about the exclusion of Sinn Fein from the Talks, on the grounds that they use force and the threat of force to achieve political ends - despite the fact that the requirement for a ceasefire has been set in statute. When he spoke with you he saw no prospect of a settlement and he has been unable to offer any suggestions as to how to keep the talks process going, apart from asking the Unionists what action they propose to take to repair the damage. He has returned to his familiar theme of calling for the two Governments to take responsibility and impose a solution.

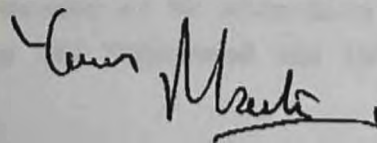
Speaking notes are attached on the following topics:

Drumcree

Policing (also includes background note)

Talks process

A copy goes to Jan Polley



MARTIN HOWARD

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BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Section 7(2) of the Police Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 provides that:

"The Police Authority with the approval of the Secretary of State may call upon any senior officer of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to retire in the interests of efficiency and (without prejudice to the foregoing) shall, if required by the Secretary of State, call upon the Chief Constable so to retire."

It would therefore be open to the Secretary of State to require the Police Authority for Northern Ireland to call upon the Chief Constable to retire. It would however be likely to be a lengthy affair because section 7(3) of the same Act provides for officers subjected to that call to be able to make representations on their own behalf and where such representations are made that an Inquiry shall be held to consider the matter and to report to the Secretary of State. The Chief Constable is of course due to retire, in normal circumstances, on 3 November this year.

2. However in direct relation to recent events in Northern Ireland, decisions taken by the Chief Constable and utterances from various local and other politicians and others the Chief Constable's position must now be viewed against the backdrop of what was said in the House by the Secretary of State on Monday 15 July. Then, when addressing the week's developments and particularly in relation to the Chief Constable's handling of the situation he made it clear that the Chief Constable "... had and retains the Government's full support". In reply to one point made by Mr Mates (official report column 974) he said:- "... he (the Chief Constable) has taken an unparalleled degree of personal criticism. I reiterate what I said in my statement on behalf of the Government: we uphold each of the decisions that he took".

3. Alderman Sean Neeson, a member of Mr Alderdice's Alliance Party and ex-mayor of Carrickfergus has indicated his intention of putting

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forward a motion of no confidence in the Chief Constable because of the decisions he has taken over the past 10 days in relation to Drumcree et seq. He is to do so, apparently, after the Authority has discussed recent events with the Chief Constable at a meeting on Friday afternoon. It is by no means certain that Mr Neeson will press the motion but if he does, while there is no positive intelligence about the mood of all the Members of the Authority, it is thought the motion would not be passed: there can however be no guarantee. If it were to be passed it would be of serious concern and a matter for the Secretary of State to discuss with the Chairman of the Police Authority.

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