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Prime Minister

File
John 15/7.

Some useful background here, and a suggestion that a solution may not be as remote as it appears at the moment.
John 9/7.

DESK IMMEDIATE

From: PS/Secretary of State
9 July 1996

- cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
- Mr Leach (B&L) - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Ray - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Hill (B&L) - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Budd, Cabinet Office
- Mr Holmes, No 10 Downing Street

Mr Steele - B

DRUMCREE: BRENDAN McALLISTER

Brendan McAllister, head of the Mediation Network, accompanied by Mr Joe Campbell, called on the Secretary of State on 8 July. You and I were also present.

Mr McAllister opened by saying that he thought a certain amount of theatre had to be gone through before we reached the prospect of a resolution of the problems at Drumcree and elsewhere. The Mediation Network had got a reasonable reception with the Orange Order and with David Trimble at and around Drumcree. He thought the most likely option was the identification of a compromise route, though currently nationalists in Drumcree were against it because of the Orange Order's refusal to talk to them. Their hard line was based on the triumphalistic experience of last year's march and their distrust of David Trimble who had become leader of the UUP directly as a result of last year's Drumcree confrontation. They felt they had made a gesture last year and had been snubbed. McAllister did not think that local Orangemen had understood how nationalists felt about this.

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The Secretary of State said that the Orange Order claimed that the Garvaghy Road Residents Group was in fact dominated by Sinn Fein. McAllister acknowledged this was a problem. He said that the Drumcree situation was also linked to prospects for the Lower Ormeau Road on Friday. There the question of lack of face-to-face contact had also been a problem. He thought that if the RUC were to let the Orange Order down the Ormeau Road this might help defuse the overall situation. He was investigating the possibility that representative groups in Lower Ormeau and in Portadown could make an explicit statement to the effect that they were not in any way linked to Sinn Fein or any other organisation. His impression was that the Orange Order might be open to that sort of approach on the basis that they could hold the Ormeau and Portadown nationalist groupings to that pledge at a later date.

McAllister went on to say that it was crucial that HMG was not seen to do a deal with the Orange Order which would be seen by nationalists as 'playing the Orange card'. This was what nationalists expected in their perception of a weak government in hoc to the Unionists. The police therefore had to remain resolute. He had said as much to Ronnie Flanagan. Any compromise had to be produced by the community. The Secretary of State agreed that the key was dialogue. You said that you saw the force of the argument in respect of the police cutting deals with the Orange Order, but said the same concerns apply to the police having contact with local residents groups. McAllister and Campbell said there were dangers in the latter as well.

Looking further ahead, McAllister said that it was possible to envisage a situation by Thursday evening whereby a compromise route which took in part of the Garvaghy Road could be agreed. It would not be possible to take about 'compromise' in public. It would have to be described as a 'principled route'. The Orange Order could claim that they had walked the Garvaghy Road but that they had reached an accommodation on the basis of respect for law and order and concerns that Orange values about individual liberty etc were at risk.

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The Secretary of State said that he would shortly be seeing David Trimble, Ian Paisley and Martin Smyth. What would they want from him? McAllister said that they were banking on the police pulling and the Government giving way. The Secretary of State said the police had to win this particular battle. He was prepared to reinforce them to whatever degree was necessary. McAllister said that Trimble et al would be likely to complain about the RUC and would want the decision of the Chief Constable changed. Campbell said that at the end of the meeting Trimble, Paisley and Smyth needed to know that what happened over the next few days was their responsibility.

There was then a brief discussion about what was actually happening on the ground at Drumcree with worries being expressed by McAllister about the sinister nature of some of the abuse thrown by the Orangemen at the police. You made the point that quite a lot of the activity at Drumcree appeared to have been orchestrated by Orange stewards.

Comment

As ever, Brendan McAllister is working hard to see if he can find an accommodation. Unfortunately, he regards himself as hampered by what happened last year and the perception on the Garvaghy Road that the Orange Order failed to live up to their side of the bargain. The Secretary of State, however, shares his analysis that there is a certain amount of theatre to be gone through before the conditions can come right for possible resolution.

(SIGNED)

MARTIN HOWARD
Private Secretary

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