

CONFIDENTIAL

CC Ego
JH

From: PS/Secretary of State
9 July 1996

DESK IMMEDIATE

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 Butt, Cabinet Office
Mr Holmes, No 10 Downing Street

NBPM

F.4

M15A

Mr Steele - B

DRUMCREE: TRIMBLE, PAISLEY AND SMYTH

The Secretary of State saw David Trimble and Ian Paisley for an hour and ten minutes yesterday evening, 8 July. They were joined at the last minute by Martin Smyth. You and I were also present.

Trimble arrived without Paisley to start with. He immediately launched in by saying that the situation was "bloody awful" and was about to get much worse. The RUC had attacked the crowd as part of their move to provide separation between the protestors and the police at Drumcree. The Orange Order had tried to persuade the RUC to provide a separation and had suggested the erection of crush barriers. He had gone to see Inspector Mooney about the prospects for introducing physical separation and while he was doing that, the protestors were charged by the RUC to create the space to install concrete barriers and barbed wire. He thought this had been a damn fool idea and he claimed that Inspector Mooney agreed with him. He was now negotiating with the Divisional Commander to see what could be done to obscure or remove the barbed wire. He thought that the nature of the physical barrier erected only made the prospect of stone throwing and a response by baton rounds more likely. One person who had been hit by a baton round was on a life support machine.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Trimble continued by issuing dire warnings about what would happen that night. He thought that there would be more casualties and possibly fatalities. He thought the prospect of the loyalist ceasefire holding was very remote. Instead of pushing the parade down the Garvaghy Road, which would only have taken 15-20 minutes, the Chief Constable had now engineered a major confrontation. We now had to decide how to handle that. He had spoken to Ronnie Flanagan but nothing of substance had emerged from that. On the basis that no-one seemed to be doing anything to resolve the situation he had wanted to see the Prime Minister with his colleagues. He had been told that it would be proper for him to see the Secretary of State first and he was doing so. Time was desperately short. He thought that after Wednesday the situation would be very grave.

At this point, Paisley arrived. He agreed that the situation was extremely serious and recounted a number of anecdotes including the presence of hooded men roaming about in Ballymena and thugs wearing artificial Orange sashes. Trimble said that the likely prospect was that the loyalists would turn on the police. At best we were faced with a repetition of what happened in 1985/86 in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish agreement. Paisley then offered a few more examples of police unreasonableness, including his concern that many police in the front line at Drumcree had had no numbers on their uniforms.

The Secretary of State said that clearly the behaviour of the police had to be proper and within the law. If there were reasons for complaint then complaints should be made. His main concern was how the situation could be resolved. He made the point that the police had come under severe attack and in these circumstances incidents were bound to happen. On the overall situation, he said that the Chief Constable had taken the view that to allow the march down the Garvaghy Road would lead to serious disorder and he had therefore prohibited movement beyond a certain point on the route. He said that David Trimble had agreed earlier that this was an operational matter for the police. The Secretary of State had seen the Chief Constable last Thursday and he had explained to the Chief

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

then that the Government would support whatever option he chose on operational grounds. The job for the RUC was to keep the peace. It was not possible to direct the police to change their decision. Accordingly, the way to solve this problem was for the two sides to reach an accommodation.

Trimble said that there was no prospect of this. His contacts with Jesuits and others had not been successful. In his view, nationalists in Portadown were not interested in a compromise and were not talking. Paisley said that a lot of what was happening this year was as a result of last year's events. He noted what the Secretary of State had said about the Chief Constable about the prospect of civil commotion. Surely the Chief Constable could have seen that what had occurred had been much worse.

The Secretary of State repeated that the constitutional position was clear and that he could not order the Chief Constable to change an operational decision. He did not want to be judgemental in the situation. Both sides believed they had right on their side, and neither side were natural confronters of the police. Trimble said this was not true of Brendan McKenna and other leaders of the Garvaghy Road Residents Association. He did grudgingly admit that the ordinary residents might fall into that category. He agreed that the situation could only be resolved by talking but it would take time. The problem was that if the situation continued through the night of 11 July and into 12 July, then there could be massive rioting.

The Secretary of State said that the situation needed to be resolved at Portadown. If that were done, much of the rest would fade away. Paisley said that there had to be some movement in the position of police. He and Trimble said that what was needed was a period of calm between now and the Twelfth which might allow room for dialogue to develop. Trimble agreed with Paisley that this had to be set in the context of what happened last year. The confrontation had acquired a symbolic meaning for the people of Northern Ireland.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

The Secretary of State agreed that there was a need for a period of calm in order to allow the influence of Trimble and his colleagues to make a difference. He repeated that he would continue to back the Chief Constable. Paisley issued dire warnings about what would happen that night: it would be calamitous. He said that parts of the Province had seen nothing yet. The Secretary of State said that Paisley and Trimble had been right to put their concerns to Ronnie Flanagan. Paisley asked if Flanagan changed his mind, would the Secretary of State support him? The Secretary of State confirmed that he would. He also said that restraint needed to be demonstrated on both sides.

There was then a rather confusing exchange about who had been in charge last year and who was in charge of Drumcree this year, at the end of which, it was agreed there was a need for Trimble and his colleagues to have a clear idea of police responsibility in Drumcree and a means of making easy contact. You agreed to follow this up and I understand that in a subsequent meeting with Ronnie Flanagan, appropriate details were passed to Trimble, Paisley and Smyth.

Trimble then returned to quoting various examples of unreasonable behaviour by the security forces. He cited an incident where soldiers had been on one side of the barbed wire armed only with firearms with no riot gear obviously available. He had drawn this to the attention of the police but was not sure whether the message had been received, given the problems of communication referred to earlier. He said that someone was pouring petrol on the flames and it was not the Orange Order. He said that the paramilitaries had actually been helpful during the night. The trouble had not been orchestrated.

The Secretary of State returned to the question of dialogue. He asked whether it would help if the Garvaghy Road Residents Group were to disclaim links with Sinn Fein. Trimble said that this would not help in the case of Brendan McKenna who was a well-known Sinn Fein activist and convicted terrorist. Paisley said that others in the Garvaghy Road had simply been stirring up trouble and inciting or intimidating the local residents to be prepared to demonstrate.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Trimble then reverted to criticism of the Chief Constable for not taking the march through the Garvaghy Road. The Secretary of State said that the Chief Constable had had severe doubts about whether it would be operationally possible. Trimble said he did not accept this. He said that he had nevertheless appreciated what the Secretary of State said. He would, however, probably renew his request for a meeting with the Prime Minister (afternote: this was confirmed later last night and is being set up for this afternoon). The Secretary of State said that he did not intend to make any statement about this meeting. What Paisley and Trimble said to the press was up to them.

At this moment Martin Smyth arrived and for another 20 minutes or so we went over roughly the same ground. Smyth did not have anything particularly new to offer other than to say that he did not think we were living in a police state and that he deplored the attitude of the police for kowtowing to republicanism. He said that he was endeavouring to try and get the loyalists to draw back from this confrontation and accept that it was a purely Orange issue.

The Secretary of State repeated the point to Smyth about the Garvaghy Road residents issuing a statement disassociating themselves with Sinn Fein. Smyth said this would be helpful but repeated that McKenna was persona non grata. He was very fearful that we were getting into a repetition of the early 70s when the no-go areas were established.

Trimble finished the meeting by confirming what we already knew, that his delegation would not be turning up at the Talks on 9 and 10 July. The Secretary of State noted this and said that in any case activity in Castle Buildings would be confined to bilateral talks, thus making it clear in a low-key way that the process would continue even if the Unionists were not present.

Comment

Both Trimble and Paisley were in a subdued but extremely worried frame of mind. They clearly recognised the seriousness of the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

situation but laid the blame firmly at the door of the Chief Constable for not having allowed the parade to go through. There was no overt criticism of the Government but that may follow. They evidently want to find a way through this, but can only see a solution on the basis that the Chief Constable's decision is reversed. The Secretary of State made it very plain that he would back the Chief Constable in his decision and would make available whatever resources were needed to allow that to happen.

The meeting happened as a result of Trimble's attempts to see the Prime Minister, but it did not in the end turn out simply to be a going through of the motions prior to a meeting with the Prime Minister - though that has now been arranged.

(SIGNED)

MARTIN HOWARD
Private Secretary

CONFIDENTIAL

SOFS/28339/LB