

RESTRICTED**From:** Peter Westmacott**Date:** 11 July 1996

File
John 12/7

cc: Minister
 PS/Sir P Mayhew
 PS/Sir Michael Ancram
 Mr Holmes, No 10
 Mr Stephens, NIO(L)
 Mr Lamont, RID, FCO
 Mr Pellow, NAD, FCO
 Chancery, Dublin

Ambassador**NORTHERN IRELAND: DRUMCREE**

1. As you know, I took a call from Mary Ann Peters in the NSC this morning about the Chief Constable's decision to allow a Protestant march to go ahead this afternoon. She made two points, quite forcefully:

- (a) the decision conveyed a damaging message of the willingness of the police to give in to force of numbers; and
- (b) it risked undermining all the good work which the RUC had done over the past year to demonstrate that it was not pro-Unionist.

2. After talking to Michael Ancram's office, I explained the background to the Chief Constable's decision, emphasising that only local people had been allowed to march, there had been no bands, no triumphalism, and no Unionist leaders present. The Chief Constable's decision had been taken on operational grounds, in the light of his judgement that allowing a limited march to take place today was less dangerous than the alternative of 50,000 Protestants converging on Drumcree on Friday, with no sign of any compromise from either side in the meantime. I subsequently faxed Ms Peters and Ms Soderberg (White House) the Secretary of State's statement supporting the Chief Constable's decision.

3. I also spoke to Martha Pope, Mitchell's Chief of Staff, in Belfast. She said that, with Mitchell back in the US for the weekend, none of the political leaders had made a serious attempt to involve him in the Drumcree show-down. She had declined to return Brendan MacCionnaith's calls, and advised Mitchell not to comment on anything which was outside his terms of reference as Talks Chairman. Her own view was that the Chief Constable had taken the right decision, given that both sides had become so dug in. It was nonsense to suggest that this showed that the RUC was, after all, on the side of the

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Unionists. If that had been the case, the RUC would not have insisted on the re-routing of the march in the first place.

4. At Ms Pope's suggestion, I also had a word with Senator Mitchell in Washington this morning, to put him in the picture. I wanted him to know the circumstances of the Chief Constable's decision; and that he should feel free to call the Embassy if he needed any further information. Mitchell was more equivocal than his Chief of Staff. He said only that he felt sorry for the position in which Sir Hugh Annesley found himself. The Chief Constable was a very decent man. He hoped the Nationalist community would not react with hostility. The only thing now as to "keep the damn talks" going. I said that at least the Unionists would be in the room when business resumed next week. Mitchell laughed. He hoped the SDLP would be there too.

4. Predictably, Congressman Peter King has issued a statement (copy attached) criticising the RUC's decision. I rang his office to say that, far from "pouring gasoline on the fire", the Chief Constable's decision had been intended to avoid the risk of far worse disorder on 12 July if the ban had been maintained. Dan Michaelis, King's staffer, promised to pass this on; and thought that King would wish to telephone later in the day. He hasn't yet done so.

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