

SECRET

774.

FROM: TOM CLARKE

Security Policy and Operations Division  
10 July 1996

Copy no of 24

DESK IMMEDIATE

cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B [3&4]  
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B [5&6]  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B [7&8]  
PS/Sir David Fell - B [9]  
Mr Legge - B [10]  
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B [11&12]  
Mr Steele - B [13]  
Mr Leach (B&L) - B [14&15]  
Mr Watkins - B [16]  
Mr Ray - B [17]  
Mr Perry - B [18]  
Mr Stephens - B [19]  
Mr Hill (B&L) - B [20&21]  
Mr Maccabe - B [22]  
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office [23]  
Mr Holmes, No 10 [24]

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B [1&2]

DRUMCREE: MEETING ON 10 JULY AT RUC HEADQUARTERS

The Chief Constable accompanied by Chief Superintendent Sillery and the GOC met with the Secretary of State, Michael Ancram, Mr Lemon, yourself and I on 10 July at RUC HQ.

2. The Chief Constable indicated that the Orange Order leaders at Drumcree would not move from their stated position, however, Dr Mowlam thought that the Garvaghy Road Residents Group could be influenced by someone of prominence, particularly Cardinal Daly. They were extremely frightened about what could happen. The Deputy Chief Constable had asked the Orange Order to put off their announcement of a mass rally at Drumcree on 12 July from 2.00 pm to later. However, the RUC had not been able to make much progress on developing negotiations. The Chief Constable went on to explain that the sticking point for McKenna was Trimble and Paisley's attitude last year, though he and other residents of Garvaghy Road

SECRET

Page 1 of 8

S E C R E T

2

recognised that the case for accommodation was now much stronger. What was needed was a package agreed by either side in advance. The Chief Constable however, was not sure that such a package could be agreed in that the Orangemen felt they were batting on a good wicket and in particular that Gracey was not entirely appreciative of the position that he had created.

3. The Chief Constable went on to state at this time the general security situation was peaceful. Last night's violence however had a different emphasis in that there was more of a hooligan element involved and that it had gone quiet from around 3.00 am. He then went on to say that if large numbers assembled at Drumcree, there would be particular problems. He felt from an operational point of view, that it would not be possible to seal off Portadown to prevent large numbers gathering because this meant that he would be fighting on a number of fronts. He had looked further at whether an attempt should be made to take Drumcree from the Orangemen but this was considered not to be a good option. The Chief Constable therefore felt there were two options - (1) to reach accommodation or (2) that the RUC should stand firm.

4. The Chief Constable then said that if large numbers arrived at Drumcree and breached the RUC and Army defences, the main RUC task would then switch to protecting the estate. In defending the police lines he could use plastic baton rounds, truncheons and armoured vehicles but he would not, unless faced with a life or death situation, open fire with live ammunition. If there was no accommodation, numbers would win and he must then devote his resources to protecting the residents.

5. The General Officer Commanding said that the central question was how far we were prepared to escalate the situation facing an overwhelming crowd of possibly 40,000 or 50,000 with tractors and diggers. We must anticipate there would be a breach of Police/Army defences because of the numbers. If however, we took the initiative and tried to clear Drumcree, where would we take this initiative too? He further then stated that if the security forces held the

S E C R E T

Page 2 of 2

ground at Drumcree, they must have a fall back position and we could not leave it too long; it was essential that Army and Police forces were not divided by the crowd. He agreed with the Chief Constable that the security of the estate would then become paramount.

6. The Secretary of State said that the Ormeau Road issue was completely separate and if we attempted to link the two there was a possibility of a judicial review. He further agreed that we should not attempt to take Drumcree. He felt we should concentrate on the scenario of a large crowd gathering at Drumcree and attempting to force the police lines. The Secretary of State asked if the RUC and Army had ever been "defeated" by weight of numbers on previous occasions. The Chief Constable replied that not in Northern Ireland though it had happened in other parts of the world. The Secretary of State then went on to ask was it not possible to prevent large numbers arriving at Portadown. The Chief Constable repeated his view that it was not possible but stated that he was due to have a meeting with regional commanders and he would look at this situation again; however he did repeat that he did not in his professional judgement think it was likely. The Secretary of State considered that the numbers of Orangemen could be substantially diminished if attempts were made to prevent them from reaching Portadown and that it would seem extremely strange if we did not try. The Chief Constable said that the numbers could be reduced but that the general operational view was that Portadown could not be sealed off. The GOC then said that his understanding was that the Orange Order plan to divide their forces. Fifty per cent of each Lodge would be told to attend their normal demonstrations while the remainder would be sent to Drumcree. When the local demonstrations were finished, the numbers at Drumcree would then swell with those attending local demonstrations. The GOC also made the point that the RUC and Army could not concentrate additional forces in Portadown. The Secretary of State, exploring the matter further, asked whether substantial numbers reaching Portadown could be reduced without diminishing capability elsewhere. The Chief Constable indicated he was happy to give a more fuller response to this after his operational meeting but still remained of the view that it would be extremely difficult

SECRET

4

to undertake this exercise. In response to a point made by Michael Ancram, the Chief Constable said that if attempts were made to seal off Portadown, trouble could erupt at the blockage or the Orangemen could go back to their original starting point and cause trouble there.

7. The Secretary of State asked if the maximum number of personnel had already been deployed at Drumcree and could additional resources be directed there without causing a situation where people were falling over each other. The Chief Constable in reply said that he certainly had not got all the people he had needed and indeed at one stage last night he had not enough resources to answer calls in Belfast. The Chief Constable then, in a response to a query from the Secretary of State, indicated that he had an even chance of holding a large crowd at Drumcree, depending on the numbers who actually attended and how worked up they were. Michael Ancram asked if the mob was held on Friday what they would do next. The Chief Constable indicated that many factors would play a part in this, including the weather at the time and whether some people would drop off the demonstration through fatigue. The PUS asked were the RUC prepared for a sustained campaign and whether the odds of winning the battle on Friday and holding the position indefinitely were substantially less than simply winning. The Chief Constable replied in the affirmative, stressing that the Orange Order were in an extremely buoyant mood and that the more opposition the RUC put up, the greater was the chance of more Orangemen appearing. The Chief Constable however, felt the position could not be held at a maximum any more than three or four days. The GOC also intervened to say that if that was the position, there would be a need to prioritise RUC and Army resources and difficult decisions may have to be made and in particular mayhem elsewhere might have to be ignored in order to carry out the operational mission at Drumcree. The Chief Constable then said the spin off was that Garvaghy Road was not an isolated incident. If nationalists were seen to be overrun in Portadown, then there may be an increase in trouble in nationalist estates elsewhere. He intimidated that PIRA had given guns to nationalists in Belfast over the past 24 hours for self-defence

SECRET

S E C R E T

purposes. The Secretary of State then asked how confident the Chief Constable was protecting the Garvaghy Road estate. The Chief Constable indicated that there was a very strong chance of him being able to do that in that it was not in the Orange Order's interests to be seen to overrun the estate, though clearly there would be a hooligan element attached who may attempt that very thing. The GOC said in that situation where a life or death confrontation may arise, then live ammunition could be used.

8. The Secretary of State then pondered whether in a position where no accommodation was reached, how could the Chief Constable take the Orange Order down the Garvaghy Road by consent and what signals would be sent out if the Chief Constable changed his original decision. The Chief Constable said he had no great enthusiasm for that. Indeed the Orange Order would not be happy with artificial restrictions being imposed on their numbers. The Secretary of State then asked that if accommodation could be achieved, which would be the worst scenario in terms of the interests that the Chief Constable had to bear in mind. The Chief Constable replied that if the march was taken down it would be seen as a surrender to mob rule. If not, the RUC would at least have been seen to be attempting to do what they had set out to do. Therefore the latter was more preferable. PUS asked what might be the strength of the opposition. The Chief Constable indicated that PIRA had massed 1,000 persons for the Ormeau Road. There would be significant opposition if the parade was forced down the road but this might be balanced by the fear of what could happen if it did not proceed. PUS then mused what would the Provos make of an attempt to force the march down the road; what might be the price that we would have to pay? The Chief Constable took the firm view that Trimble was playing into PIRA hands and that if the march went down Garvaghy Road we would have a battle on the Ormeau Road on 12 July and in Londonderry later. The PUS wondered whether there would be Orange casualties if the march was forced down the road. The Chief Constable felt that this was not a high risk.

S E C R E T

Page 5 of 8

9. The Secretary of State then, taking a different tack, indicated that Archbishop Eames said that McKenna would not tolerate the Orange Order on the Garvaghy Road and that he must be part of any deal. He further went on to say that Ken Maginnis had indicated that unionists might accept an independent review of the whole area of marches as a trade-off for being allowed to march down Garvaghy Road and that John Steele was presently talking about this to McKenna. Michael Ancram said that Archbishop Eames' actual words were that whilst the Garvaghy residents would not agree to the march they recognised that they could not stop it. PUS said that it might be possible to agree for the parade down Garvaghy Road to proceed against the background of an independent review. The Chief Constable said that in operational terms an accommodation had to be set up by 12 noon tomorrow at the latest or he had to begin plans to make operational deployments. The GOC reinforced this by saying that you could not negotiate with the position falling round you.

10. The PUS sought confirmation that the original RUC decision to stop the Orange Order marching down the road was to buy time for others to negotiate. The Chief Constable said that as we approach Friday, any accommodation must be announced in advance otherwise we may have to impose a solution. PUS said it was rational to reach an accommodation and that it might be the Government that would have to arrive at and impose that accommodation. The Chief Constable said that no decision was worth the loss of human life. To allow the march down Garvaghy Road would be seen as surrender of the Catholic community. Certainly nationalists could be controlled easier. The Orange Order were able to cause confrontations all round the Province and they had an element of tacit support by members of the unionist community; indeed many opinion formers were keeping their head down. The issue for the Government was that if we could not get accommodation that it would have to be the imposition of the least lousy of a set of options; expediency may have to assume ascendancy but how that was presented was important. PUS said that in the broader context we must be seen to give something to nationalists. The Chief Constable agreed and said that nationalists must be in the position to register their protest but not through

physical force. Michael Ancram then said that if the four church leaders said there was only one option, what effect might this have. The Chief Constable took the view that this would create a situation of no losers and no winners. He said that any decision must be capable of being changed and asked that Government weigh up all the implications. He felt the only way forward in an accommodation was for a limited number of people to come down Garvaghy Road but that this be wrapped up with a Government statement promising something further. He pointed out however, this would leave Government in a vulnerable position, for example, what would happen next July. PUS again commented that a general addressing of the parades situation must be part of the solution. Michael Ancram commented that the trick would be how to engineer that.

11. The Secretary of State then returned to the question of the potential risk to life if the RUC's lines were breached. The GOC said that in this scenario he could easily foresee loss particularly if the residents of Garvaghy Road wanted to meet force with force. The Secretary of State then asked what was the distance from the front line to the fall back position to which the GOC indicated it would be around 1 km. The Secretary of State said it would be deeply distasteful to have a situation where the Army and RUC were being seen to being chased. The Chief Constable however commented that it would not be a matter of running away but conducting an orderly fall back.

12. The Secretary of State summarised by saying that the Chief Constable needed to review whether it was possible to block off Portadown yet retain his capability at Drumcree. In addition the Government had to do all that it could to stimulate a settlement. There would be a need for the group to meet again. PUS said it would be important for Government to promote a positive line. This might be that whilst the Chief Constable had made an initial decision, it had to be reviewed in relation to the agreement revealed by the church leaders.

S E C R E T

13. The Secretary of State said that he would hold a press conference this afternoon. At this conference he would be underlining the need for a settlement of the dispute and making an appeal for reason. He would also outline the costs to date of all the trouble. The Chief Constable offered to brief the church leaders together on the realities of the situation. Michael Ancram thought it would be better if the Chief Constable did not do this preceding the meeting with David Trimble. In the end it was agreed that the Chief Constable would see Cardinal Daly before the church leaders got together.

(Signed)

TOM CLARKE

SHA Extn 27017

S E C R E T

Page 8 of 8