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file JD

From the Private Secretary

12 July 1996

*Soderberg draft*

### MARCHES

You will have seen my record of the Prime Minister's conversation with the Taoiseach last night. I have not recorded my various conversations with Paddy Teahon through the day. As you can imagine, we covered very similar ground, in more detail. Teahon said that he had never known such an angry reaction as there had been both from Nationalists in Northern Ireland and within the Republic. Many people were simply at a loss to understand why the original decision had been reversed. I explained at length the circumstances, in particular the change in the Chief Constable's assessment of the risks, which had led him to conclude that it was better to let a limited march through than prolong the increasingly dangerous stand-off. I underlined that the risks from the stand-off were predominantly to the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. Like the Taoiseach, Teahon seemed to find it difficult to believe that the RUC and the Army could not have contained the situation.

I should also record a conversation late last night with Nancy Soderberg. She did not take the approach of expressing direct concerns, as Mary-Ann Peters had done to Peter Westmacott earlier. Instead, she listened to my explanation of the decisions and why they had been taken, without comment. However, she did pass on, without explicit endorsement, concerns which were being expressed to her, both from the Nationalist side in Northern Ireland and from the Irish-American community in the British Government. Hume and Adams had both been on the telephone. Hume had been particularly wound up, saying that the decision had undercut the confidence of the Nationalist community in the British Government. Adams had been concerned that he was being prevented from entering the Ormeau Road area (I believe that in fact he was allowed in later). Soderberg said that two consistent themes in calls she had received had been that the British Government needed to do something "strong" to restore confidence, and that what had happened made the

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decommissioning issue more difficult, and strengthened the case for genuine parallelism. There was also a view that the need for direct contact of some kind between the British Government and Sinn Fein had been strengthened (presumably this came from Adams).

Nancy Soderberg mentioned two other points which had been registered with her strongly. One was that the decision to go ahead with the march appeared to have been taken in the end without consultation with the local residents. I strongly contested this, and gave her an account of the local negotiations and the difficulties they had encountered. The second was the need for an independent commission to prevent these situations arising in future. I made clear our own thinking on this.

Soderberg said that she was working to ensure that the US Administration said as little as possible. I encouraged her to continue her efforts. No good would come of criticism from outside, implied or otherwise.

My guess is that Peter Westmacott's good work with the NSC and others earlier in the day had already moderated US reactions. It was certainly noticeable that Soderberg was careful to avoid any suggestion of direct criticism of the Chief Constable's decisions.

I am copying this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Sir John Kerr in Washington (by fax).

Yours ever  
John

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