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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

No. 9447 P. 2/4



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CC EO
JH

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON

NBSm

File

John 15/7.

Dear John,

July 1996

THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S CONVERSATION WITH DICK SPRING: 13 JULY 1996

The Secretary of State and the Tanaiste spoke on the telephone for about 10 minutes on Saturday 13 July.

After opening pleasantries, Secretary of State said that the Prime Minister had made it very clear that he did not want an IGC to take place. Nevertheless, there was clearly a strong case for the two Governments' meeting as soon as possible, and the Talks process might provide an appropriate venue. The Tanaiste expressed surprise that an IGC appeared unacceptable. The Secretary of State said that he thought it was not the most appropriate way of making contact between the two Governments at this stage. The Prime Minister had been very angry about what the Taoiseach had said that morning and had given the clearest instructions about an IGC. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State repeated that it was important to meet, both to discuss the current situation and to help move the Talks process forward.

Tanaiste said that the British Government was totally underestimating the depth of nationalist feeling over what had happened on the Garvaghy Road. He agreed that the two Governments had to work together. He regretted that the Irish Government had not been consulted in advance of the decisions made by the Chief Constable. Secretary of State made the point that in the case of

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the Ormeau Road march, he had only been informed of the RUC decision just as the march had finished passing through the Lower Ormeau. As for the Garvaghy Road, the decision had only been taken at 10.30am on 11 July two hours before the march went through.

The Tanaiste said that the clear perception was that the RUC were not prepared for violent confrontation with the Orange Order, but were more than happy to confront nationalists. Secretary of State pointed out that the prospect on 11 July was a convergence of maybe 50-70,000 Orangemen on Drumcree with the potential for major disorder and significant risk to life. The Chief Constable had to be guided by what was in the legislation which meant that decisions on whether marches should go ahead should be based on the risk of disorder. He believed that the Chief Constable had taken the right decision in each case.

The Tanaiste said that so far he had taken a low profile on this issue. But he was coming under intense pressure from the nationalist community, including for a visit by himself to Northern Ireland. He asked what the prospects were for the remainder of the Marching Season. Secretary of State said that the next major event was the Apprentice Boys March in Derry in August. We needed calm to descend and the RUC to maintain order. He said that, personally, he loathed the marches and had been very critical of those who had caused such mayhem in the early part of last week on the media. But he had to stress again that it would not have been feasible for the police and the army to deal with tens of thousands of Orangemen without having to open fire, which would have been completely unacceptable.

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The Tanaiste renewed his request for an IGC. The Secretary of State said that at the moment the Prime Minister was clear that this was politically impossible. He remained very angry about what the Taoiseach had said that morning: The Prime Minister had not expected to be denounced in that way. The Secretary of State said, once again, that the two Governments should nevertheless talk and try and rebuild the process. He said that he would also counsel strongly against the Tanaiste coming to Northern Ireland at this stage. The Tanaiste took note.

Comment

Though there was no meeting of minds, this was an entirely amicable conversation. The Tanaiste did not come back over the weekend to renew the discussion. It has in any case largely been overtaken by what the Secretary of State has said in the House of Commons this afternoon.

A copy of this goes to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Colin Budd and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office)


MARTIN HOWARD

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