

INTERVIEW WITH SIR HUGH ANNESLEY, CHIEF CONSTABLE, RUC
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Re the decision by the Secretary of State to close part of Derry's Walls, the Chief Constable said if he had not acted, the scenes of confrontation which marred last year's demonstration would have been repeated. Our security correspondent, Henry McDonald, asked him if his decision would be perceived by some as a concession to Republicans and a surrender to the threat of violence.

Sir Hugh: I'm sorry about that. I understand it, but I'm sorry about it. Whatever decision is made in circumstances in which groups cannot agree, one side or the other can level that accusation. I had hoped we would have a local agreement. It seems to me from what I've read that one of the sticking points was to try and spread this beyond Londonderry. I think that's a pity, and I think the Bishop today made the same point. But my issue is not to be judgmental, my duty is to simply look at a situation like this and say, do I anticipate serious disorder there, and how do I prevent it, and one of the ways is to sterilise that part of the Walls. Now, there are about 600m that would take about 200 policemen for a 4-day period; therefore I asked the Secretary of State for a ban where his powers are much wider than mine to actually hold it with civil
[interdiction].

Henry McDonald: But was there any consideration taken of the potential of this situation blowing up in allowing republicans to go back to violence? Was that taken when you had your discussions with the Secretary of State.

Sir Hugh: Well, of course, all of those things are taken into consideration, but the principal issue won't go

away. There is an impasse here, both sides have a different view on a particular area of this march and it should be said that the Apprentice Boys have a long history of marching through a particular area that is not owned by anybody and is not contentious, with the exception on that one area. If that cannot be reconciled, whether I like it or whether I don't like it, I've got to try and find some solution that would keep the two parties apart, at that point. Now, I accept that there are hard feelings about this. I accept people will be disappointed but can I just remind you what was said by the major organisation's press release when they said, a society which does not [issue / assume] violence and turmoil, whatever the perceived justification, is on the road to nowhere. The principal issue to avoid violence now is to accept the Secretary of State's order and for people to tailor their marching proposals accordingly. I hope with all my heart that that's what the Apprentice Boys will do, and I can understand very sincerely their concerns but it surely does not [] what is in fact, in effect, a minor alteration on the proposed route. That should not bring us into disorder, and I hope they will accept it.

Henry McDonald: Do you accept that the RUC are still in a no-win situation regardless of which decision, you're still stuck in the middle?

Sir Hugh: Can I just say, in each of these three annual reports for the last three years, I have drawn attention to the serious public order problems in Northern Ireland. I've said we cannot resolve them, I've said this is a matter for the public, for the politicians, and we are always stuck, as I've said before, between a rock and a hard place. I cannot

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RADIO CLARENCE - 12
James McKee: resolve this issue. I wish I could, if I could I would. But if the two sides concerned won't give, then what I've got to do pragmatically is say, where is there likely to be disorder, and having identified that spot, actually stop the two sides coming together at that point.

James McKee: Do you accept now that that stretch of the mile has had to be closed to you, and will be closed to you on Saturday?

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Alasdair Simpson: Well, if you were standing here you would see it and there's no way anybody would normally stop that parade then.

James McKee: So what decision now forces the Apprentice Boys?

Alasdair Simpson: Well, the decision will be made on Saturday morning, whatever's getting done it will be done at a General Committee meeting held on Saturday morning before the parade starts.

James McKee: And what considerations do you believe have to inform the decision that you take?

Alasdair Simpson: Well, that's up to the governing body of the Apprentice Boys, whatever they say, I have to accept it.

James McKee: What would your guidelines to them be?

Alasdair Simpson: That will be for us to tell them on Saturday morning.

James McKee: So will you just tell us what the procedure is for now that we've had up to this decision?

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