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From: EDWARD OAKDEN

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PRIME MINISTER

APPRENTICE BOYS' MARCH: UPDATE

John Hume chaired a fourth round of talks this morning between the Apprentice Boys and the Bogside Residents Association. But it broke down at lunchtime. Although Hume has since made brave-sounding noises about the possibility of resumption, the talks had in practice reached impasse.

This was primarily because the Bogside Residents Association insisted on widening the issue from the march on Saturday to the conduct of marches in general. They argued that, against the backdrop of Drumcree and its aftermath, it was no longer possible to deal with single marches in isolation.

They insisted on the principle of consent: that the Apprentice Boys (and Orange Order) concede the general principle that they would only march through a given area if they had already secured the residents' agreement to this. This requirement should also apply to areas abutting the route of the march. If the Apprentice Boys conceded this, then the Bogside Residents would agree to the Apprentice Boys' terms for the march round the walls (that about 250 people march, representing the 10 Londonderry clubs, but without marching tunes being played in the part overlooking the Bogside). Unsurprisingly, the Apprentice Boys were not prepared to agree on these terms.

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Paddy Mayhew met the Chief Constable this afternoon. They concluded that, despite Hume's best efforts, the prospects for an agreed outcome were now slight.

They decided to go for the RUC's preferred option (from the options considered at the end of last week: David Kyle's letter of 2 August, which you have): namely that the Parade should proceed, but that part of the city walls should be closed. Paddy Mayhew will sign an Order to this effect under Article V of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987 at 1600 tomorrow afternoon (Wednesday). This will ban the Parade from the western section of the wall, on the grounds that undue demands would otherwise be placed on security force resources.

This decision will be announced at 1800 tomorrow, and will be accompanied by a press statement.

It will then be for the Chief Constable, in liaison with the Army, to make his operational dispositions in consequence. For example, troops will be pre-positioned on the section of the wall that is to be closed, to prevent eg. the Apprentice Boys occupying it. Sinn Fein also have a meeting in this area on the evening before the march.

The geography of the area is apparently much more helpful to the security forces than Drumcree. Given this prior warning, the RUC are fairly confident that it ought to be possible to avoid large-scale trouble on Saturday.

The NIO will be writing round to NI shortly before tomorrow's announcement, to inform (not consult) them on what is planned.

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