

From THE SECRET
THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



Prime Minister (by fax)

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

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This shows that preparations
are in hand as far as they
can be. Agreement is still
possible, but the fall-back looks
sensible. Meanwhile we have been
telling the Irish and Americans to
use their influence with Sinn Féin
and will continue to do so.

Edward will keep you in
touch as events develop.
Fingers crossed, but it will be
a miracle if there is no violence
at all. Jan 218

2 August 1996

PM spoke 3/8
to Mayhew

APPRENTICE BOYS PARADE: LONDONDERRY, 10 AUGUST

My Secretary of State chaired a meeting this morning of the Security Policy Meeting, at which the Chief Constable and GOC were present, to discuss the handling of the Apprentice Boys parade in Londonderry on 10 August. This letter reports the latest position.

Current Position

Opposition to the parade, while orchestrated by the Sinn Féin-influenced Bogside Residents' Association, goes wide in the Nationalist community. Concern focuses on two issues: the use of the walls by the Apprentice Boys' Parent Clubs, particularly the section which overlooks the Bogside; and to a lesser extent the holding of any Apprentice Boys parade on the west bank of the Foyle. Further background is at Annex A.

Intensive efforts to resolve the situation continue, involving the RUC, NIO, and church and community leaders. Encouragingly, the parade organisers met the Bogside residents and others under John Hume's chairmanship on Wednesday. Some progress was made, and the outlines of an accommodation, based on a small parade going round the walls, may be emerging. A further meeting is to be held on Monday 5 August.

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This, so far, is hopeful. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go. Reports suggest that MacNiallais, the principal Sinn Fein representative at the meeting, did not support the proposed compromise and continued to press for linkages with parades in other areas; a critical factor in reaching an accommodation will be the Sinn Fein leadership's assessment of the balance of advantage for them in the situation. They will not wish to allow the SDLP to claim the credit for any compromise.

Overall, tensions in the Province remain high. Since Drumcree there have been clashes following a number of parades, including those at Omagh on 20 July and Keady on 27 July. At present, however, the situation on the ground is generally calm. RUC-led negotiations on the routes of other Apprentice Day marches in Belfast, Keady and Dunloy continue: it is most unlikely that any will proceed in the absence of local agreements.

HMG'S Objectives

Our objectives are twofold: to prevent sectarian violence; and to work for a compromise which encourages unionist co-operation and avoids putting strains on the loyalist ceasefire, while at the same time restoring nationalist confidence in the security forces' handling of parades, and denying Sinn Fein a propaganda victory. The RUC's priorities continue to be the protection of life and property, the maintenance of law and order, and preventing paramilitaries from exploiting a volatile situation.

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Operational Planning

Against this background, the security forces are continuing to develop their operational plans. NIO officials are in close touch with them, and a joint RUC/Army/NIO co-ordination cell has been established.

The indications are that, in the absence of agreement, Sinn Fein will appeal to nationalists throughout Ireland to support the cause in Londonderry, a move which could draw in large numbers of protesters. Some republican elements may seek a confrontation with the police or marchers; there is evidence that preparations are being made for widespread disruption and violence in the City and elsewhere. The Apprentice Boys, while not seeking a stand-off, have been slow to offer compromises acceptable to residents. The loyalist paramilitaries seem unlikely to use the issue to orchestrate disorder or break their ceasefire unless severely provoked.

Options

The security forces have identified three options for the handling of the parades:

Option 1: the parade proceeds as notified, with or without agreement. The best outcome is for the parade to go ahead with the agreement of all concerned. In the absence of such agreement, the parade could only be put through by force, with the prospect of serious disorder in Londonderry and elsewhere. Considerable RUC and Army resources would be required; the RUC's ability to police the rest of the Province could be severely stretched.

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Option 2: the parade proceeds, but - in the absence of agreement - with restrictions on its use of all or part of the city walls. Such restrictions would be imposed by either the Chief Constable or the Secretary of State, under the relevant provisions of the public order legislation. The decision would be taken early next week, and announced in advance. This approach is the RUC's preferred option, and was considered in some detail at SPM (see below).

Option 3: the parade is banned altogether, or confined to the east bank of the Foyle. This would involve blocking the bridges across the Foyle, and would leave the only remaining Protestant enclave on the west bank cut off. This could provoke a serious loyalist reaction and risks a Drumcree-type stand-off. It would also involve a significant commitment of security force resources. The Chief Constable would support such a step only if it had become clear that the parade's access to the west bank could not be guaranteed even after partial closure of the walls.

SPM Conclusions

The Secretary of State discussed these options with the Chief Constable and the GOC this morning, and concluded that partial closure of the walls offered the best solution, operationally and presentationally, in the absence of agreement. The Secretary of State confirmed that he would be prepared to sign an Order under Article 5 of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987 banning the parade from the western section of the wall, on the grounds of the undue demands that would otherwise be placed on security force resources.

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The note is that the
Apprentice Boys would
not contest this

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A decision on whether to implement the ban will be taken after a further meeting of SPM on the morning of Tuesday, 6 August. This will take account of any progress in negotiations between the parade organisers and Bogside residents the previous evening. A further report will be made to the Prime Minister following that discussion.

A joint RUC-NIO presentational handling plan in support of this strategy is being prepared.

It has not been possible to clear this with the Secretary of State. As you wish to get this into the Prime Minister's weekend box, I am forwarding it without clearance. The Secretary of State will see this tonight.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley and Colin Budd.

Jan
Jan
C D KYLE

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