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Political Affairs Division  
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Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Priestly - B  
Mr Cornick - B  
Mr Lavery - B  
Mr Perry - B  
Mrs Collins - B  
Mr Lamont, RID - B  
HMA, Dublin - B

*W 26/9*  
*FOUW.*  
*Walt - need,*  
*→ 1/2 hr f'g*  
*John 13/9.*

PS/Michael Ancram (DENI,B&L) - B

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: THE DRUMCREE EFFECT

This paper examines the current mood in both communities, and amongst the main political parties, and draws some conclusions about its likely impact on the political development process and more generally. It is based mainly on conversations with PAB's political, community and journalistic contacts, but also draws on several illuminating reports by colleagues outside the Division. It is not, I am afraid, encouraging.

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## Introduction

2. At the beginning of the all-party negotiations, Dr John Alderdice stated that in his opinion they were taking place in the worst possible atmosphere, evidenced by the victory of extremists (by which he meant Sinn Fein and the DUP) in the election on 30 May, at the expense of the middle ground represented by the Alliance Party, the UUP and the SDLP. He said he could not remember greater polarisation of Northern Ireland society. The events at Drumcree, and the associated widespread disorder, gave graphic definition to this sense of polarisation.

## Unionism

3. From the violence of the Unionist reaction it is obvious that Drumcree touched a raw nerve. Parades, particularly by the Orange Order, occupy a place at the heart of the Protestant/Unionist sense of identity. For many, Orangeism uniquely defines their sense of self-worth; and in a period when they perceive advancement of the Nationalist agenda to be the objective of the British and Irish Governments, banning the Drumcree march was seen as a final cut. All the ingredients for a profound grievance were there: Protestants denied the right to parade to their place of worship along a route sanctified by tradition; and denied it, moreover, at the behest of Dublin and a handful of Catholic residents whose emotions were being manipulated by Sinn Fein/PIRA. While the response to the banning of the march on 7 July was scarcely spontaneous, it was undoubtedly heartfelt.

4. Within this general framework, however, it is possible to discern gradations in the Unionist response. Most vociferous were the exponents of the "line in the sand" philosophy. Dr Paisley repeated the apocalyptic warnings of last year, claiming that the decision to ban the parade was a Dublin-inspired attack on the civil and religious liberties of Protestantism. The frustration of this plot was a prize "worth fighting for, and worth dying for." (It is



interesting, however, that he chose largely to absent himself from activities of the ground preferring, not for the first time in a long career, to make the falls rather than fire them). Paisley Junior saw Drumcree as the awakening of the sleeping giant of Loyalist resistance: "Who can tell what actions it will take in defence of itself and in defiance of Republicanism?" In equally trenchant terms the UUP's David Burnside defended the right of British subjects to march: "No area of Northern Ireland is Nationalist ... irrespective of how people vote. Northern Ireland is British, every single inch of it. Whether it is Coleraine or Crossmaglen, it is British, and that is the principle." In the Protestant Fountain area of Londonderry in early August, a wall slogan appeared setting out the text of a new (eleventh) commandment: "Thou shalt not surrender."

5. Without completely divorcing themselves from such an analysis, other Unionists demonstrated a slightly less simplistic approach. While feeling that the resistance demonstrated at Drumcree was justified, this group at least showed some awareness of the consequences in terms of damage to community relations, the local economy, and the image of Northern Ireland in the wider world. This was manifested in the debate which took place in the Forum on 19 July. An air of moral ambivalence was discernible in the contributions of many speakers, for although the violence was ritually deplored, concerted efforts were made to ensure that the responsibility for it was not laid at the door of either the Orange Order or Unionism in general. The most elegant expression of this was when Robert McCartney suggested that adherence to the rule of law was not an absolute requirement when the majority of the population was deprived of accountable government. But less accomplished sophists were content to praise the firmness and discipline of the Orange brethren and to blame the hangers-on for the violence and destruction.



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6. The sense of equivocation displayed on that occasion has since been underscored by other Unionist representatives. Privately some are prepared to acknowledge that politically and presentationally Drumcree was a disaster. Yet, while admitting it was wrong, many believe it was a gesture which had to be made. The mood is encapsulated in the comment by the Mayor of Coleraine, a Borough which has invested enormous efforts in promoting tourism in recent years: "There are times when principles cannot be upheld without cost, and this is one of them."

7. Insofar as it can be said to represent a strand of pro-Union thinking, the business community - unsurprisingly - focussed on the economic consequences of Drumcree. A joint statement issued in early August by the Chamber of Commerce, the CBI, the Trade Unions and related influential bodies pointed out that displays of sectarian violence constituted a self-inflicted wound which the Northern Ireland economy simply could not afford. In an increasingly competitive world, community stability is a minimum pre-requisite for positive investment decisions. The statement avoided apportioning blame, but emphasised in unusually blunt terms the consequences of Drumcree.

8. A final segment of opinion was represented by the liberal apologists, who suggested that Drumcree was a major setback to hopes of creating a society where genuine parity of esteem might persuade significant numbers of Roman Catholics/Nationalists that fulfilling the aspiration of a United Ireland was something which could safely be left to posterity. In mid-July, the Presbyterian Church issued a strong but carefully worded statement which criticised the events surrounding Drumcree as basically unchristian, implied that the Orange Order could not absolve itself of all responsibility for the subsequent violence, suggested that "tradition" (as in "traditional parades") ought to be modified where it conflicted with the Gospel message, and recognised that Roman Catholics might well perceive the RUC actions at Drumcree to be less than even-handed. Presbyterians

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from 14 unspecified congregations subsequently wrote to the Irish News in early August to ask forgiveness from Roman Catholics for the "common sin" of Drumcree.

9. Assessing the relative strengths of these categories of opinion (which of course are not so clearly differentiated in reality as may be suggested by the above) is difficult. The first - the "line in the sand" brigade - probably encompasses the DUP, some at least of the UUP right wing, and a sizeable proportion of the estimated 60,000 members of the Orange Order. It is worth noting, however, that the Orange Order did not repeat last year's gesture of striking a 'seige of Drumcree' medal. And that the thuggish elements who had been happy to demonstrate their "loyalty" before the lifting of the RUC ban on 11 July did not mount any displays of triumphalism afterwards, and surrendered the streets to Republican protestors. On its own, the "line in the sand" mentality does not define the tone of Unionism at present.

10. Nor have the third and fourth categories identified above - the economic and conscience-driven liberals - predominated either. The analysis of the Unionist business community is logically correct but politically ill-timed. Its impact has been severely blunted by the campaign of boycotting Protestant business in the border areas of Fermanagh and Tyrone by Catholics retaliating against the owners for their alleged Loyalist activities in recent weeks. And as for the fourth strand of opinion, apart for the DUP's condemnation of the Presbyterian church statement ("an outrage and a disgrace") no-one appears to have picked up the challenge.

11. The significant grouping, therefore, is that section of Unionism which, to varying degrees, lent its support to the principle it saw at stake at Drumcree, while retaining an awareness of what the consequences might be. In a Sunday Times interview on 14 July, Deputy Chief Constable Flanagan admitted that the scale of opposition to banning the Drumcree march had been a surprise - the "silent majority" in the Unionist community had simply not stood up



to Loyalist violence and disruption, and consequently the RUC had been stretched to operational breaking point. Although he did not say so, the comparison he had in mind was the response of the Protestant middle classes to the UWC strike of 1974. (Paradoxically as Professor Paul Bew indicated in a recent conversation with Peter Bell, it is this group which demonstrates a particularly unfortunate resistance to taking on board the crucial political lesson which has emerged from the development of the Anglo-Irish process in recent years, namely that change to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland has become the remotest of possibilities with the introduction of the consent principle). Instead, the phenomenon of Protestant alienation is resurfacing once more, and the accompanying sense of insecurity and isolation seems to have overwhelmed the capacity for rational analysis in this crucial sector of Unionism. Sectarianism, in thought, word and deed, is also manifesting itself to an alarming degree, not just in Sandy Row and the Shankill, but in comfortable middle-class areas like South Belfast, North Down and Enniskillen. A leading journalist told me a few days ago that amongst Protestants and Catholics it is as rife as he has ever found it. It is also apparent in the graffiti that have appeared on walls throughout Northern Ireland (in both Protestant and Catholic areas).

12. The way in which Unionists have recently replicated the tactics they once so despised when deployed by Nationalists - for example, abstention from elected bodies, condemnation of the RUC, claiming denial of civil rights and liberties, and initiating street violence and civil unrest - suggests that they have decided that such tactics will also serve to achieve Unionist objectives. The extent to which this Unionist group remains wilfully blind to the effects of such behaviour on opinion in Britain and abroad is not the least worrying aspect of the situation. It points to the existence of a mindset which sees dangers in peace and negotiation, and positive benefits in maintaining a state of violence and unrest.



## Nationalists

13. In many ways, Drumcree was a moment of truth for Nationalists too. The RUC's decision to allow the parade to proceed has resurrected all the old fears that playing the Orange card at the right time can take the trick, and even amongst the most moderate Nationalists (including those who have traditionally seen modest reform, rather than disbandment, as holding the key to the RUC's future) hope seems to have been lost. The associated widespread public disorder across Northern Ireland, where in many cases the RUC are perceived by Nationalists to have stood idly by, has served to make things worse, and there is much resentment throughout the Catholic/Nationalist community. This resentment has heightened the rivalry between the SDLP and Sinn Fein for popular support, and has also increased the tensions within the SDLP itself between those, like Seamus Mallon, Eddie McGrady and Joe Hendron, who believe that their leader's dalliance with Gerry Adams is costing them dear, and those like Brid Rodgers and Denis Haughey, who believe that all Nationalists should stand together. Under considerable pressure from the latter group, which includes pressure to stand shoulder to shoulder with Sinn Fein until that Party can take its "rightful" place at the negotiating table, the SDLP's resignation from the Forum following Drumcree was probably inevitable. But even this action, and unusually hard-line speeches by SDLP representatives at public rallies, have not been sufficient to satisfy their Republican critics, and the consequent heckling and cat-calling has had a profound effect on SDLP politicians like Mark Durkan. Many senior members of the Party are concerned that the ground lost to Sinn Fein at the election on 30 May was not merely a temporary aberration. So far these fears have been publicly muted, but there is concern that John Hume, fixated as many think he is with the peace process and the Hume/Adams relationship, is either oblivious to, or does not care about, his Party's misfortune. If he is worried it is not reflected in his discussions with HMG or the Irish Government, and some influential members of the Party feel this leads to complacency in these circles too.



14. Consequently, there is growing speculation about the fate of the SDLP at the hands of Sinn Fein at the forthcoming General and Local Government Elections. In particular, there is concern that if Hume decides not to run in the General Election (as has been speculated) in favour of the less popular Durkan, the SDLP could possibly lose the Foyle seat to Martin McGuinness. At the moment this seems unlikely, but the concern is definitely not misplaced.

15. The resentment in the Nationalist community compounds the bitterness that has been evident right across the spectrum of Catholic opinion for almost a year about what is perceived as HMG's wanton failure to respond imaginately to the PIRA ceasefire. But now to HMG's several sins of omission (for example, failure to begin meaningful dialogue with Sinn Fein, failure to improve the lot of prisoners and failure to reform the RUC) have been added perceived sins of commission such as the treatment of Catholics as "second class citizens", capitulation in the face of Unionist violence, and threats of violence, and political manipulation of the RUC. Perhaps this bitterness has not been adequately recognised in official circles - and to a degree it had been driven underground by the Docklands and Manchester bombs - but it is once again in full flow. Another respected Catholic journalist has described one of its more bizarre manifestations to me. At a dinner party last Saturday with several professional friends (also Catholics) he was heavily criticised for sending his children to "Protestant" schools (Victoria College and Methody). Although his children have been at these schools for many years, this was the first time he was subjected to such an outrageous verbal assault.

#### Conclusions - The way ahead

16. Whether David Trimble can (or wishes to) forge the contradictory strands of Unionism into a positive and forward-looking philosophy - a path the UUP seemed inclined to explore in the final months of Jim Molyneaux's leadership - remains an open question. Sources within the UUP claim that Trimble is in



hock to his right-wing supporters and so pre-occupied with suppressing insurrection amongst his Parliamentary colleagues that he has no time to give a clear sense of direction to the Party as a whole. It is also alleged that his failure to exact from the Government an electoral system for the May elections which favoured the UUP (and instead was forced to accept a system favouring the DUP) has done nothing to improve his image. Although he displayed political courage in standing up to Paisley and McCartney in the opening days of the Talks, there were mutterings among his delegates that Molyneaux would have avoided getting into such a position in the first place. While his involvement at Drumcree this year will have consolidated his position at grassroots level, it has done nothing to address the deeper problems he faces. With regard to his capacity for strategic leadership, therefore, the jury is still out; but the omens, although not all pointing the wrong way, are unpromising.

17. At present it seems doubtful whether Trimble sees much advantage in being politically adventurous. Even allowing for the possible advantage given to the DUP by the electoral system, the returns on 30 May were not those of a Unionist electorate anxious to give its leaders a mandate for flexibility and far-sightedness. (It may not be without significance that an article by him in *The Times* of 25 July consisted of a repetition of the old formula - a devolved administration and closer integration with the Westminster machine.) The combination of Paisley and McCartney worrying his flanks will also encourage caution, particularly with a General Election on the horizon. It may persuade him, indeed, of the benefits of maintaining some elbow-room, but of not moving too far from the Unionist campfire. There were signs in the final days of the Talks in July of an awareness within the UUP that it would not be helpful on the key issues such as decommissioning, for too much clear water to appear between the positions of the main Unionist parties.



18. As for the other main Unionist leaders, Ian Paisley and Robert McCartney, the best hopes appear to be that Peter Robinson can continue to play a relatively constructive rôle; and that the forces holding together the two very disparate personalities will begin to weaken (although this is unlikely if McCartney is to retain his Westminster seat, for which DUP support will be crucial). McCartney will probably continue to see the Talks as a more congenial stage than Westminster on which to parade his oratory. But the DUP's continuing involvement cannot be taken for granted. Sitting in the same chamber as Irish Ministers, under American chairmanship, while the Anglo-Irish Conference machinery continues to function, represents a considerable demarche for the Party and their position will be subject to ongoing cost-benefit analysis. So far, Paisley has been able to persuade his followers that his presence at the Talks has been beneficial in terms of acting as a brake on Anglo-Irish machinations and UUP back-sliding; but the arrival at the table of Sinn Féin or the likelihood of an unpalatable deal on decommissioning could in his eyes reverse the balance of electoral advantage, and a walkout could swiftly follow. The capacity of Unionist politicians to use displays of intransigence as a means of deriving kudos from their supporters should not be underestimated.

19. It remains too early to say if Drumcree represents a defining moment for Unionism or Nationalism. As regards the former, the evidence can be interpreted as pointing in either direction. On the one hand it is profoundly depressing that a significant section of the Unionist community found the banning of the Drumcree march such an emotive issue that they were prepared, on a narrow point of principle, to put at risk the political, economic and presentational gains of the past two years. The atavistic displays of defiance, the blindness to moral responsibility, the capacity to ignore consequences, and the failure of the politicians to provide principled and coherent leadership point to a Unionist community which has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The prospects of such a community requiring its political representatives to play a



meaningful role in the current Talks process must be assumed to be low, in circumstances where Unionist attitudes have hardened considerably in the light of what they perceive as a determined assault on their bottom line..

20. On the other hand, the compromises reached by the Apprentice Boys at Londonderry and Ballaghy can be read as indicating that the principle of marching by consent has, de facto, been conceded. The absolute right of Loyalists to march where and when they choose has been qualified; and the "line in the sand" group allowed it to happen. Perhaps the view over the edge of the abyss at Drumcree introduced a sense of realism that will inform the approach of Unionist politicians in the resumed Talks, and moderate the views of their supporters as the General and Local Government Elections loom larger.

21. For Nationalists the attitude of HMG and the Unionists to the peace process will continue to be crucial. So will HMG's attitude to reform, including more than ever, reform of the RUC. With the SDLP under growing pressure from Sinn Fein any Government overtures to Unionism will cause that Party great concern and they, and Sinn Fein, will press for compensating "concessions", to Nationalism. The fight for Nationalist hearts and minds is really on, and will intensify during the coming months, especially amongst middle-class Catholics. Unfortunately this will severely limit both Parties' scope for compromise (which in the case of Sinn Fein is already minimal) and could prove a serious, and possibly fatal, handicap to the Talks process.

22. It would be nice to finish on an optimistic note, but I am afraid there are very few around at present. Probably the most encouraging harbingers of success are the willingness of the Alliance Party to stick to the task of finding an accommodation



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despite their electoral reversals and prevailing gloom; and the mature and constructive contributions of the smaller groups (the UDP, PUP, Womens' Coalition and Labour) despite internal conflicts and disparagement by their larger rivals.

(Signed)

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