

14-OCT-1997 15:57

PRIV OFF STORMONT

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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
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Prime Minister

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*You will recall that
I have raised this with you
in Strasbourg. It is a slightly
absurd, but I think we can make
the change no suggests to the Bill
(attached, with the relevant passage
highlighted) without upsetting the
Unionists seriously. Paddy Teahan was
an to me today about this again
and it would be a good gesture
to them.*

14 October 1997

Dear John,

Content?

*✓
14/10*

PUBLIC PROCESSIONS ETC (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL

My Secretary of State spoke to you this afternoon about her wish to make a small amendment to the above Bill. This is to meet strong Irish Government concern that, if the Parades Commission's extended remit is seen as permitting it to regulate the activities of the Gaelic Athletic Association, this could alienate nationalists by implying that the Government believes their sporting activities are on a par with contentious Orange parades, and might prompt the Irish to voice public criticism of the Bill (even though, as the Irish know, the extended remit will not be implemented for the time being).

GAA sports - Gaelic football and hurling - are very widely supported by nationalists North and South, and the great majority of Fianna Fail politicians would have direct experience of them. The Taoiseach is a particular enthusiast, and he pressed the Prime Minister on this point at their meeting in Strasbourg on 10 October, as your record of the meeting notes.

My Secretary of State came under renewed pressure from David Andrews and other Irish Ministers on the same point in Castle Buildings today. Since

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this clearly is a major point for the Irish (and nationalists more widely), but in fact has little substantive significance (not least because the Commission might well not choose to regard GAA matches as coming within its purview), she believes that it would be right to meet the Irish on the issue in order to give the best launch possible to the new arrangements for handling parades, in the credibility of which much is invested.

While there might be some unionist criticism of this, very few unionists or even members of the Loyal Orders in practice object to GAA matches per se, though some have raised as an issue the conduct of crowds and the marshalling of traffic associated with matches. They will see it as another favour to nationalism. However, these are problems common to a number of sporting events, and concerns on this score should be capable of being addressed by the police and others in the normal way.

My Secretary of State would therefore be grateful for the Prime Minister's agreement to make this change to the Bill (which would formally entail adding in clause 3, which provides for the extended remit, the phrase "or to sporting events", so that clause 3(3) would read:

"this section does not apply to public processions or to sporting events").

Dr Mowlam thinks it is worth doing - particularly if there is no review (external) on Bloody Sunday.

Cheerly!

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If the Prime Minister is content with the change, I attach a speaking note which could be deployed if the Taoiseach contacts him on the subject tomorrow (which we believe is possible).

(not attached)

Adam Ingram will mention this possibility at the meeting of Legislation Committee this afternoon.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Jan Polley.

Yours ever,
Ken,
W K LINDSAY

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TOTAL P.03