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ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT BELFAST
AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNEACH BÉAL FEIRSTE

6 July 1989

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr O'Donovan
Mr Collins asked me
to give you this copy
of his report on marches

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Meeting on Northern Ireland Marches

Dear Assistant Secretary

I had a meeting on the marching season in Northern Ireland with the Assistant Secretary in charge of the Law and Order Branch of the Northern Ireland Office in Stormont, Mr. Peter Bell, on Tuesday, 4 July, 1989. Mr. Gaffey of the Irish side of the Secretariat, Mr. Canavan of the British side of the Secretariat and Mr. Bell's Deputy, Mr. Eric Dalzell, also attended.

The Irish side of the Secretariat had submitted a summary memorandum on 14 June in relation to marches. We had done this to be formally on the record in relation to such issues as the necessity to re-route marches in Portadown. The discussion began with a general run over the ground, based on the latest information from the Department's contacts in the nationalist community. We expressed particular concern about the Duncairn Gardens area of North Belfast (we spoke from a memorandum from Brian Feeney in this respect), about the Crumlin Road area, Portadown, Annalong and Ballinahinch in Co. Down and Keady in Co. Armagh. As a result of our own analysis in the Secretariat we expressed concern about marches in Limavaddy and concern about the likely dangers attending marches in Derry this year, given that it is the 20th anniversary of the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland.

We made a major point of expressing disquiet about the possible deployment of the UDR during the marching season, given the issue of plastic bullet rounds to the UDR in selected areas in the past week. There could be no doubt, we said, that the introduction, or any hint of the introduction, of the UDR to riot control situations would lead to serious violence. Given the suspicions which had been aroused by the issue of plastic bullet rounds to the UDR, we sought, and were given, an unambiguous assurance that the UDR would not be deployed for purposes of riot control. We made much of the information which the Department had received up from the SDLP's Belfast City Councillor, Dr. Alasdair McDonnell, to the effect that unaccompanied UDR patrols had been policing a march in the Lower Ormeau Road area last week. This, we said, had caused grave doubts among nationalists

about British plans for the use of the UDR in general and during the marching season in particular.

The British side replied that there were 1200 marches planned for the next few months by both sides of the Community in Northern Ireland. All, from the most extreme Orangemen to Sinn Féin, had complied with the provisions of the 1987 Public Order legislation (requiring a minimum of 7 days notice to the Police etc.).

They were confident from their discussions with the police that adequate measures had been taken. General policy was to route marches away from nationalist areas and, where an agreement on a route could not be reached, there would be no hesitation in banning marches, though banning was a last resort given that it could provoke a riot. The British side responded to our concern that the proposed march in Rasharkin, Co. Antrim, should be banned by saying that, if a restricted and non-contentious route could not be agreed, Rasharkin "would be high on the list for banning". In general terms, they felt that the police had been getting the marching season right in recent years, but they were conscious of our point that 1989 could prove to be a difficult year. It was not always possible to predict where trouble would arise but, generally speaking, they would agree with us that North Belfast, Portadown, Keady, Ballinahinch, Derry, Limavaddy and Rasharkin, Co. Antrim, merited especially close attention.

The Chief Constable of the RUC, Mr. Hugh Annesley, who came to dinner in the Secretariat last night (the discussion is reported on separately), said that his main concern on marches related to Portadown and Keady - he said that, in his view, Keady was being "hyped up by the media and outside elements". We had the impression that, in relation to marches, the new Chief Constable is not prepared to overrule his local commanders - this year at least - save in the most exceptional circumstances. His approach to the general issue of re-routing will be, as he put it, "an incremental one". He said that he could not agree to the re-routing of the Portadown march for this year, though he did not rule it out as a future option. The Chief Constable made a point of saying that he would not recommend banning a march where the imposition of a ban was likely to lead to a riot.

On specifics, the British side said the following:

Duncairn Gardens

There are no marches in Duncairn Gardens itself this year. We expressed some surprise about this, but the British side said they were sure their information was correct.

Keady

The police had worked out a route with local priests and community leaders. It involved a compromise whereby the marchers would be allowed to march once around the Square. We said that our information was that marching in the town

*This is repeated
by the local
PA and SDLP.*

centre was virtually certain to lead to trouble. When I asked if the compromise route was acceptable to "the local M.P." (I meant Mr. Seamus Mallon), Dalzell of the British side replied "no comment".

Portadown

When?

The local police had advised that the traditional "Church Parade" on the Sunday before 12th July should take place a little later in the day this year and that the 12 July Parade itself should take place very early in the morning.

Limavaddy

Good

The police would insist that marching take place early in the evening,. The then Chief Constable had assured us last year, during a visit to the Secretariat, that an early evening marching rule would be imposed, but we understand that this was not adhered to in practice.

Bonfires

We expressed concern about the dangers of bonfires and asked about the fire regulations governing them and about the enforcement of such regulations. Our interlocutors did not know the specific answers to our questions but gave an undertaking to check the position and come back to us on the point.

Conclusion

We agreed that we would meet briefly again on Monday, 10 July, to review the latest position.

Yours sincerely

Padraic Collins

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