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295/2

AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH
BÉAL FEIRSTE

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BELFAST

*Mr. Don
Par on relevant files etc.*

Confidential

26 March 1996

*Mr. McEntyre
(Already
cc'd.)*

COPY TO:	1E
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MR. P TEAHON	
MR. S. DONLON	
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Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

*PA IRA
CC INLA
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96*

Dear Second Secretary

Discussion with the Chief Constable

I had a brief discussion with the Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Annesley, and other senior RUC officers at the Police Authority lunch today.

A number of points of interest arose in relation to the current situation and the outlook for the marching season.

The characterisation offered of the present situation is that "we are in limbo - everything is extremely uncertain and, therefore, very unstable".

The Chief Constable identified three possible scenarios:

- A return to all-out violence by the IRA;
- A restoration of the ceasefire very shortly before 10 June, thereby facilitating Sinn Féin entry to the talks;
- No declaration one way or the other about the ceasefire, either before or after 10 June; consequently, no Sinn Féin participation in the talks; however, no violence but a prolonged period of uncertainty, lasting probably until the next general elections in

both the UK and Ireland (and possible changes of Government in both jurisdictions).

Of these, Sir Hugh rules out the first and considers the second slightly more likely than the third. He expects that there will be further violence in Britain - as a "frightener" prior to the restoration of the ceasefire.

The Chief Constable does not, however, expect any resumption of violence in Northern Ireland. He is firmly of the view that, as the Republican "rank-and-file" do not want to return to violence, the IRA leadership will confine their attentions to Britain. They know that a resumption here will precipitate an immediate Loyalist response and that the situation will rapidly go out of control thereafter.

As of now, the Loyalist leadership is "solid" in relation to its own ceasefire. Despite recent belligerent statement, they have, in the Chief Constable's judgement, absolutely no intention of going back to violence.

He was inclined to regard last week's INLA statement as "posturing". One possibility which worries him is that, looking for a pretext to justify a resumption here, the IRA might see value in having the INLA carry out on its behalf attacks on Loyalist targets which would provoke retaliation. On balance, however, he considers this unlikely.

On the third scenario which he outlined, the Chief Constable suggested that a protracted stalemate could weaken Gerry Adams' authority within the Republican movement, to the point where Gerry Kelly would supplant him. This stalemate scenario could come about if the Republicans, conscious that the next decision on a ceasefire must be their definitive one, decide that the 10 June talks do not give them what they are looking for and that new political constellations in both countries could make it easier for them to take this extraordinarily difficult decision.

We reviewed the outlook for the forthcoming marching season. We were joined for this discussion by Blair Wallace, the Deputy Chief Constable (who has today switched jobs with Ronnie Flanagan, moving from the operational area to a liaison/support role), and by ACC Freddie Hall (who was responsible for last year's Portadown route decisions).

The consensus among all three is that this year's marching season will be extremely difficult. At the key locations (Ormeau Road and Portadown), there are no signs of compromise between the different groups. If anything, people are more entrenched in their positions

than last year. Anticipating a re-run of last year's difficulties, the Chief Constable commented that "we'll just have to stand firm and hold the line once again".

I argued that every effort must be made to prevent a recurrence of last year's confrontations. To allow Orangemen to parade down the Garvaghy Road once again would be to court disaster. The Chief Constable replied that he and his colleagues would be doing their very best to prevent this but that, contrary to rumours which had been circulating there, no guarantee to this effect had been given - nor could it be given.

A particular difficulty is that the "Spirit of Drumcree" group are putting pressure on the more moderate Orangemen and the latter, in their contacts with the RUC, are pleading that this is removing their room for manoeuvre (in terms reminiscent of UUP complaints about DUP pressure). David Trimble is "hoist on his own petard" in that the Spirit of Drumcree people will remind him of how he was elected leader and demand a repeat performance. His recent Lurgan appearance was no doubt a warm-up for this.

The Ormeau Road march on Easter Monday may well set the tone for this year's marching season. Another parade to watch will be the Duncairn Gardens march in Belfast on the third Friday of June, i.e., very shortly after the scheduled beginning of all-party talks and an election which everybody expects to have a polarising effect.

I asked whether the Chief Constable had, as promised, submitted proposals to the British Government to have these sensitive decisions taken not by the RUC but by an independent tribunal of some description. Sir Hugh replied that he had not done so, partly because it would take "too long in law" to implement such an idea and partly because it did not enjoy the Government's full support. He would, of course, like to have such an approach agreed, as it would shift the responsibility for decisions in this highly politicised area from the RUC to others.

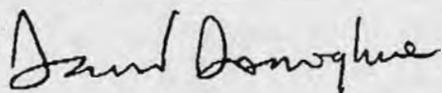
His colleagues agreed that this would be very desirable. However, they found it hard to imagine a situation in which the RUC would be entirely liberated from the pressures brought to bear by the different groups. One way or another, the RUC would have to police the routes decided by a tribunal. Prior understandings between the police and local groups are still potentially the best way of defusing these problems. Furthermore, if a tribunal were to decide that a particular parade should be banned, it would be the RUC who would have to face "the five thousand people who are determined to march anyway".

295/5

In sum, the Chief Constable and his colleagues are distinctly uneasy about a marching season which will be no less confrontational than last year's and which will get underway in earnest during a period of marked political tension and volatility.

We will have an opportunity to explore these issues further when the Chief Constable and Ronnie Flanagan come to dinner in the Secretariat shortly.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Joint Secretary