



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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SEAN DONLON

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*Review  
for the powers review  
Gulph. (see file H.)*

Oifig an Taoisigh  
Office of the Taoiseach

*Mr. O. Hanrahan*

*Mr. McKee*

*(see of 193)*

12 July, 1996.

The Rt. Hon.. John Major M.P.  
British Prime Minister.

Dear *John*

You will by now have been made aware of the public and the media reaction to yesterday's decision to allow the Drumcree Orange parade down the Garvaghy Road. The perception of nationalists is best summed up by the commentator who wrote that "all pretence of democratic government died in Northern Ireland yesterday.....the British Government eyeballed Ulster loyalists who were rejecting the Government's rights and writ and blinked".

I do not, of course, expect you to agree with this but I do believe it important that you are aware of what the mood is.

Oifig an Taoisigh, Tithe an Rialtais, Baile Átha Cliath 2.  
Office of the Taoiseach, Government Buildings, Dublin 2.

Oifig an Taoisigh  
Office of the Taoiseach

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The message which nationalists have taken from yesterday's events is that, once more, unionists have established that if a decision is taken which they do not like, they simply bring the masses onto the street, and the British Government will back down. Democracy and the rule of law in Northern Ireland are perceived to be conditional. Those prepared to use force or the threat of force are perceived to be the ultimate arbiters.

Whatever our differences, we are equally committed to democracy and united in our opposition to violence. I believe it is now important that we be seen to act together to deal with the current difficulties. I have two specific suggestions.

First, we should hold a very early meeting of the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference for the sole purpose of considering how controversial parades might be handled in future. As I said to you on the telephone last night - and Mr. Annesley seems to agree - it is not reasonable to expect the RUC Chief Constable to take decisions about parade routes which are capable of such enormous political consequences, and which go to the heart of the responsibility of democratically elected Governments in regard to the maintenance of order.

Oifig an Taoisigh  
Office of the Taoiseach

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It is for this reason that I suggest the immediate appointment of an Independent Parades Routes Commission whose function would be to arbitrate cases of disputed routes. Broadly, what we have in mind is that the Commission would take evidence from all sides including the parade organisers, representatives of the communities impacted by the parade and the security forces. The Commission would do its work in public and announce its judgement well in advance of the parade date. It would then be a matter for the RUC to take the operational decisions required to ensure that the Commission's judgement was enforced.

Second, I suggest that both Governments need, before the end of the month, to agree on specific steps and a timetable to inject a sense of urgency into the Belfast Inter-Party Talks. I would appreciate your views as to how this might be achieved

Unless both Governments act decisively together and are seen to do so in the next few days, I am concerned that the damage done by the Drumcree decision

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Office of the Taoiseach

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will be exacerbated and events will slip beyond our control. It would then become even more difficult for us to deal with violence and the threats of violence, irrespective of the source.

Yours sincerely,

