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Reference Code: 2021/98/5

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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

22 JULY 1996

Thank you for your letter of 12 July.

Your proposal that we be seen to act together was followed almost immediately by your interview on British television, which ran directly contrary to it. You know how strongly I felt about that. It seemed to me unhelpful in every way, to put it at its most polite.

Nevertheless, there is nothing to be gained by raking over this ground. I do agree that the two Governments must work together to turn round the dreadful events of a week ago. The meeting of the IGC on Thursday was a start.

As I have said publicly, I am determined to do all I can to jolt the Belfast talks into action, and move on from procedure to substance. This is not going to be at all easy, to say the least. You know as well as I do the current mood of the SDLP. The Unionists are somewhat chastened and apparently ready to move forward, but as suspicious as ever. We will both have to do our best to bring the main parties along. I will certainly be working for this.

Meanwhile we are doing all we can to encourage a compromise over the Apprentice Boys, to avoid any chance of a repetition of Drumcree. The

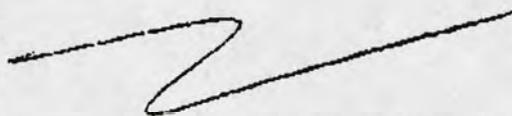
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prospects do not look too bad, and the main party leaders all seem to be ready to find a local accommodation. But there is a long way to go yet.

We also need to find a better way to deal with these problems in the long term. Paddy Mayhew has talked to Dick Spring about our proposed review, and will be making an announcement about the details shortly. The review will have an open remit to make recommendations on future handling of parades - although I fear there is no magic solution if those on the ground don't want to agree.

In short, the present situation in Northern Ireland is indeed serious. But I do not believe it is irretrievable. Our first task must be to get the talks moving forward to show that political dialogue can produce results. The alternatives are too awful to contemplate.

Yours sincerely,
P. Mayhew



Mr John Bruton TD

Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

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
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

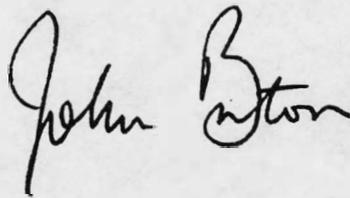
Unless both Governments act decisively together and are seen to do so in the next few days, I am concerned that the damage done by the Drumcree decision

Oifig an Taoisigh
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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Bruton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'B'.