

633/97.

FROM N P PERRY  
SECURITY POLICY AND OPERATIONS DIVISION  
11 JULY 1997

565-7  
17 JUL 1997  
CENT SEC

DESK IMMEDIATE

cc PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) - O  
PS/PUS (B&L) - O  
PS/Sir David Fell - O  
Mr Thomas - O  
Mr Watkins - O  
Mr Stephens - O  
Mr Woods - O  
Mr Warner - O

ASST./  
SEC  
22017  
10 JUL 1997  
C.C.R.U.

1. Mr Steele
2. PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O

in copy  
11.7  
11.7  
1) Mr [unclear] 22/7  
2) Note Report full  
Mr [unclear] 21/7  
The final version in  
the OS was  
slightly modified  
18/7

PARADES: ARTICLE

The Secretary of State asked for a draft article on parades by lunchtime today. I attach a draft which I am afraid have not had the opportunity to clear with colleagues. The passage on the 'three points' has been lifted largely from material prepared last week. I should be grateful if any comments could be passed direct to Private Office.

*Nick Perry*

N P PERRY  
Ext 27028

## PARADES: POSSIBLE ARTICLE BY SECRETARY OF STATE

The Orange Order's decision not to proceed with four contentious parades this weekend is a brave and principled one. It is also the right one. At a stroke the announcement has reduced tensions across the Province, eased the pressure on the security forces, and provided a new sense of hope and optimism for the people of Northern Ireland. Difficulties may still lie ahead, but we have all taken a huge step forward.

I congratulate the Order on a decision which I know was not easy for them. They have indeed acted, as they hoped, in the interests of Northern Ireland and those who live there. The sense of relief and appreciation amongst thousands of ordinary people in both communities who feared violence this weekend has been palpable. I hope and expect that others, on both sides will show similar flexibility and generosity.

This outcome reflects the hard work and commitment of many people: constructive and moderate voices within the Order, who have worked with quiet determination behind the scenes; the Chief Constable, who has been tireless in his efforts to encourage compromise; Alistair Graham and the other members of the Parades Commission; and many others, politicians, churchmen and private individuals, who have played a constructive part.

This Government too, since it came to office, has worked to encourage local accommodation over contentious parades, respecting the rights and sensitivities of both communities. Those efforts included, for example, more than 20 meetings in recent weeks between myself and representatives of residents groups and the marching orders. We have also been laying the foundation for mechanisms to help resolve disputed parades in the longer term.

The Government will be bringing forward new legislation on parades later this year based on the independent report of Dr North and his colleagues. But we are determined, in introducing our proposals, to take into account the fears and sensitivities which these issues arouse on all sides. Our proposals will be subject to the fullest possible scrutiny by Parliament. We shall be ensuring that, when legislation is introduced later this year, it will benefit fully from the experience of this marching season, and the views of all those involved, to achieve any enhancements which are possible to the new measures. We are genuinely open to serious proposals for enhancing the chances of local accommodation and the workability of new arrangements.

It was in this context, in the course of my discussions with the Orange Order in the week preceding the Garvaghy Road march on 6 July, that I made three particular points to them.

First, I reassured them that the Government is in no sense 'anti-parade'. On the contrary, we are committed to the concept of freedom of peaceful assembly, a fundamental civil liberty which will be further reinforced by incorporation into domestic law of the European Convention on Human Rights. I also explained, of course, that this right is not absolute, and must be exercised subject to lawful restrictions on the grounds of public order or to protect the rights and freedoms of others.

Secondly, I acknowledged that some in the loyal orders and the broader Protestant community saw the forthcoming parades legislation as threatening their freedom to parade peacefully. The Government believes that genuine cultural expression, which is not seen as threatening or offensive, is an important ingredient in developing a more harmonious and stable society. That objective will not be achieved either by the primacy of one side of the community, or by the belief that

one side is superior to the other in any sense, or by any cultural expressions that try to foster that view. I explained that in my view an examination of these issues would be helpful, and that I intended to ask the Parades Commission to undertake this, consulting with representatives of interests on both sides of the community and taking advantage of work done by others in related fields. The Bill which will be introduced in Parliament in the Autumn will therefore provide for such an extended role for the Commission, in addition to that already envisaged for it.

Third, some I met expressed their fear that North's recommendation that consideration should be given to the wider impact of a parade on relationships within the community did not fully recognise the central importance of parades - particularly traditional parades - to many unionists. North quite rightly states that whether or not a parade or route is long-standing cannot be the deciding factor which determines its treatment. But the Report also proposed that this should be one of the factors to be weighed in the balance by the Commission. I agree, and I believe that this should be made clear in the Bill. I have therefore decided that the Commission should be required to take into account - as one factor to be balanced against the others - the desirability of traditional parades proceeding along their customary routes. This does not mean that such parades will be guaranteed a free passage. It will be a matter for the Commission, in any particular case, to weigh up all of the factors, including that related to traditionality, before reaching a conclusion.

Dialogue on the nature and scope of the legislation will of course continue with all sides over the coming weeks.

We are not yet through this marching season. But while there may be problems to overcome in the weeks ahead, I am in no doubt that the Order's gesture this weekend represents the sort of generous move which people throughout these islands wish to see, from all sides. We can now look forward to the future.

If the past week in Northern Ireland has demonstrated both the damage and hurt which conflict over marches can cause, it has also shown the scope for open-mindedness and courage to transform even the most unpromising situation. There are lessons here not only for the parades issue, but for the wider political process. The last 72 hours have been encouraging ones for Northern Ireland.