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FR: WALTER R MYLES
Security Policy & Operations Division
2 July 1997

ASST 70/7
SEC - 3 JUL 1997
CENT SEC

- cc PS/PUS (B&L) - O
- PS/Sir David Fell - O
- Mr Steele - O
- Mr Leach - O
- Mr Watkins - O
- Mr Perry - O
- Mr Maccabe - O
- Mr Priestly
- Mr Buchanan (Parades Commission)
- Mr Smyth - O
- Dr Smyth - O
- Mr Finegan (Parades Commission)
- Mr Webb - O
- Mr Thompson
- Mr Clarke - O

C

1. cc Mr Moulton
in Cameron.

M. M. A. J.
4/7.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE PARADES CO-ORDINATION GROUP

The seventh meeting of the Northern Ireland Office Parades co-ordination Group was held on Monday 30 June in Mr Steele's office. Present were Mr Steele, Mr Watkins, Mr Perry, Mr Maccabe, Mr T Smyth, Dr P Smyth, Mr Thompson, Mr Finegan, Mr Webb and myself (as note taker).

2. Mr Steele reviewed the position since the last meeting and provided the group with details of developments regarding the parade in Drumcree. The Secretary of State and officials had maintained an intensive round of meetings with parade organisers and residents groups around Northern Ireland.

3. Two main points were discussed;

- Proximity talks involving the Secretary of State and officials, the Garvaghy Road Residents Coalition and the Orange Order had been announced by the Prime

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Minister on 25 June. Mr Steele had that day delivered invitations to the Residents Group and the Orange Order to meet the Secretary of State in Hillsborough Castle. The GRRC had greeted him with animosity and anger. This aggression may have been, in part, caused by the 'leaking' of the invitation to the Irish News but also by the report also in the Irish News of posters being put up in the Donegall Road advocating violence on Nationalists. The GRRC eventually replied, agreeing to attend but on condition that the Irish Government was represented. This request was refused, with the support of the Irish Government.

- The Proximity talks took place on Friday 27 June. Mr Steele noted that the administrative arrangements and back up were excellent and praised the work of the Hillsborough Castle and SPOB staff. During the discussions the GRRC stuck to their principles, demanding face to face negotiations and insisting on no parade on the Garvaghy Road. However, a discussion on a possible agenda they would use in these face to face talks had led to a split within the GRRC. Following an adjournment the GRRC produced a new - less unreasonable - agenda.
- The Orange Order were under great pressure, not just from NIO, to avoid becoming involved in violence against the police. Lord Cranborne and Andrew Hunter had also recently urged them to consider the wisdom of threatening the Union for a 20 minute walk. For the Order, Reverend Bingham and Denis Watson appeared to be sensible and able to see the traps. Harold Gracey was less reasonable but all agreed 8 points which could be put to the GRRC to try to meet some of their concerns.
- The Talks ended on Friday with the Secretary of State agreeing to consider all the points made. On Saturday morning Mr Steele received a telephone call from Reverend Bingham and he, the Secretary of State and Mr Leach later the same day met Reverend Bingham and Mr Watson. They suggested that if the Chief Constable and the Secretary of State were to announce that the Drumcree parade

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ould be allowed the Orange Order would announce that in light of the threatened disruption they had decided not to parade on the Garvaghy Road this year but would parade to church and back by the same route. This suggestion would be put to the District level on Wednesday evening. Reverend Bingham and Mr Watson appeared confident of success, with the decision being seen as a great triumph for the Orange Order.

- In return they asked for the Government to agree to 3 proposals.
 - That the right to parade be enshrined in the Governments proposed Bill of Rights along the lines of ECHR Articles to which the British Government had already signed up.
 - That 'traditionality' be taken into account.
 - That role of the Commission be extended beyond Unionist parades to look also at elements of Nationalist activity and culture which is objectionable to Unionists and the name of the Commission be changed to reflect this.

There then followed a discussion when each of these proposals was examined.

- How the role of the Parades Commission could be changed away from a focus on parades and widened to encompass all cultures and traditions. Clearly there were problems in Northern Ireland apart from Orange Order parades. Though there was some concern over a duplication of roles with the Community Relations bodies.
- Changing the name of the Parades Commission to something like Parades and Community Identity Commission would not cause any difficulties though the inclusion of a phrase such as 'Community Rights' would be controversial.

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The Government has already committed itself to a Bill of Rights and incorporation of the ECHR Articles.

- All were happy to accept the addition of the concept of 'traditionality' to the Bill of Rights.
3. It was acknowledged that agreeing to look at the perceived alienation of Protestant culture would not necessarily bind the Government to anything and that Nationalists may voice concerns over what may be interpreted by Sinn Fein as a deal which threatened Nationalists. The proposals would not tie the hand of the Chief Constable or the Secretary of State on parades in any other area.
 4. Mr Steele was clear that the wording of any Government statement would be very important and advised that the Secretary of State was very keen to consider seriously this proposal. Faced with the prospect of 1000 RUC and 2000 soldiers on Garvaghy Road, the threat of attacks on police and soldiers and others and the involvement of the IRA and INLA this could be a very good solution with little adverse consequence for government. 7177
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 5. There were concerns about Reverend Bingham and Mr Watson 'selling' the deal to the Brethren at their meeting on Wednesday.
 6. Mr Steele agreed to brief Alistair Graham on what was happening (done 1 July).

Signed

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