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From: PETER SMYTH
Political Affairs Division
26 June 1997

1161/6
27 JUN 1997
CENT SEC

Julia

*Check for a relevant file for this but
S Oink Identity Issues is probably the
best.*

ASST
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- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O
- PS/Mr Murphy (B&L) - O
- PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) - O
- PS/PUS (B&L) - O
- PS/Sir David Fell - O
- Mr Thomas - O
- Mr Steele - O
- Mr Leach - O
- Mr Stephens - O
- Mr Watkins - O
- Mr Bell - O
- Mr Wood (B&L) - O
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr T Smyth - O
- Mr Hill - O
- Mr Beeton - O
- Mr Brooker - O
- Mr Priestly - O
- Mr Clarke - O
- Mr Margetts - O
- Mr Warner - O
- Supt Maxwell - O

*Edward
to see a pass
for filing out*

1. cc Mr Mc Lennan - page 5
*2. In Conn - one idea of
abolish 120 pass for
any political or cultural concern
see extraordinary.*

*AC
30/6*

*1. cc Mr Henry
Mr without political
implications.*

2. In Caplan 22-6

*Mr. note X, +
underlying apartheid.
sto
4.6*

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING WITH SPIRIT OF DRUMCREE GROUP: 26 JUNE 1997

Introduction

This afternoon, John Steele and I met Joel Patton and four of his colleagues from the Spirit of Drumcree. The four - Walter Miller, Colin Bell, Willie Smith and Simon Dilmore - were all senior office-holders in Orange Districts in Tyrone and Down. The meeting was much more polite and friendly than expected, with Patton in particular proving to be considerably more thoughtful and analytical than his public image would suggest. An idea was floated of having a moratorium on all Loyal Order parades in 1998 in return for the Parades Commission undertaking an examination of how the Protestant culture could be promoted on terms of equality with the Nationalist tradition.

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Detail

2. The group listened politely to Mr Steele's analysis of the current situation, and gave the impression that, in broad terms, their own thinking was not totally dissimilar. They reserved their position on how they would respond to any accommodation which was reached as a result of the forthcoming proximity talks, but did not overtly threaten any possible outcome.
3. They - or rather Patton - explained their view that the Orange Order and the parades it holds are the main vehicle for the expression of Protestant culture. A basic principle is that the Order should not have to seek permission from Nationalists for the exercise of that culture. Beyond that there were pragmatic grounds for not negotiating, one of which, it was admitted, was the fact that any such approaches to a residents' group were tantamount to an admission that a parade might in itself be found offensive. Besides, to accept the demographic argument in relation to Garvaghy Road was to open the door to compromise routes being found unacceptable on the same grounds in due course. There was also the consideration about negotiations giving credibility to the residents' groups, and ultimately to the wider Sinn Fein project.
4. Whether or not this was an analysis which would stand up to close scrutiny, it least it was presented as one which Patton and his group had thought about. They were fully alive to the danger of the Orange Order falling into the Sinn Fein trap over Drumcree, and the RUC being forced to take a position which damaged its standing with the Protestant community.
5. In that context, Patton revealed that he had put forward a proposal at a recent meeting with Lord Cranbourne and Andrew Hunter. This was to the effect that a moratorium should be called on all Orange parades in 1998 in order to facilitate the Parades Commission carrying out an investigation of how the Protestant culture could be given the same degree of help and encouragement as was currently

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? afforded to Nationalists. This might include equality in terms of promoting Ulster-Scots and Irish, equal airtime on the media, equality of funding for sports and leisure pursuits - the precise details remained to be worked out. Part of the deal might include HMG weighing in on the Protestant side of the argument. While there would be no parades as such, it was anticipated that Protestants would assemble in fields for celebrations of their traditional culture. X

6. Patton revealed that he had already floated this idea at two other Orange meetings, and it had been taken on board. He had no doubts about the capacity of the Spirit of Drumcree group to deliver its members in support - and this in itself demonstrated the benefits of strong leadership. The real difficulty, he predicted, would be with the moderate leadership of the Order, which was addicted to the concept of annual parades, and was completely lacking in decisive leadership. William Bingham had been present when Patton had made the proposal, and had been visibly upset by its implications.

Comment

7. The initial attraction of Patton's idea - and possibly its only one - is that it represents an attempt to think in strategic terms, rather than merely reacting to the immediate situation. Patton himself commented, in relation to suggestions about varying details of the parade at Drumcree, that such proposals were mere tinkering at the edges of the real problem - an observation with which it is difficult to disagree.

8. That said, the idea of the Parades Commission accepting a wider remit in order to embrace a study of the entirety of Protestant culture and its funding is one which needs careful thought. While possibly not unhelpful, its implications need to be teased out before we can think of offering a considered view; but it is a development of which the Secretary of State may wish to be aware. If it would be useful, I will arrange a further meeting with Patton myself, and establish more details of the proposal. It may turn out to be a non-starter.

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