

cc *Wheeler's Minutes*
607/95

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FROM: PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER
28 March 1996

M. Kelly
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1. Mr. Corbett (see page 11!)
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- cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP, B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr T Smyth - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Beeton - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Hill - B

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28 MAR 1996

SIR JOHN WHEELER'S MEETING WITH MR TRIMBLE AND MR MAGINNIS - 27 MARCH 1996

The Minister met with Mr Trimble and Mr Maginnis on 27 March to discuss a range of security issues but in particular parades. Mr Steele provided official support.

Personal Security

2. The Minister opened by asking Mr Trimble if he was happy with the arrangements for his personal security. Mr Trimble said that he was content with the level of security which was provided because he cannot make an assessment and takes the advice of the experts. However, he believed that the arrangement by which his driver was a traffic branch officer was novel and may be less than that which others receive. Frankly, he had a feeling that the Chief Constable was doing with him as "a new boy to the scheme" what he would like to extend elsewhere. Mr Trimble's confidence in security branch of the RUC as the experts was dented a little by the fact that they never gave him any advice but rather asked what he would like. The Minister noted Mr Trimble's comments, he explained that the management of the Protection Unit within the RUC was ultimately for

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the Chief Constable but would ask his officials to look into the points which Mr Trimble had made. [Mrs Collins to note].

Overall Security Situation

3. The Minister described himself as the "cynic of the office" and said that he sometimes feels bad about giving a pessimistic view but all the evidence he had points to the fact that there had been no standing down of the terrorist gangs. On the contrary, they have used the past 18 months to recruit, train and target. One thing was clear, they were looking for cover preferably in the form of 'Unionist intransigence' which they could blame the Unionists or the Government on. The Minister had to be honest and admit that strategic intelligence policy had some serious gaps in it but all involved were working hard to fill the gaps. Mr Maginnis said that the Chief had made a big enough mess of Special Branch and was set to do even more damage if the rumours were to be believed that he was about to promote [REDACTED] to head of Special Branch. The Minister said that the RUC had taken very heavy losses from the Mull of Kintyre disaster and it would take time to rebuild the unit.

Decommissioning

4. Mr Trimble said that unionists would require a clear agreement of what exactly is going to happen at the beginning of talks on 10 June. They believed that HMG had to make it clear that Mitchell had to be crossed at the beginning of talks. Ken Maginnis intervened to say, not just the six Mitchell principles but the Mitchell report as a package. Mr Trimble agreed and said that the reason for his insistence was that he was sure that the Irish and others would try to sneak Sinn Fein into talks without a proper commitment to Mitchell. In response to a question from Mr Trimble about whether it was our perception that PIRA/Sinn Fein were 'all over the place at the moment' the Minister said that we know there is a debate going on and we had to work on the assumption that the hard men will win. At best Sinn Fein might come back with a weak ceasefire to ensure the Unionists or HMG's rejection of it as a ticket into all party talks; this could give PIRA the excuse for full scale violence.

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5. Mr Trimble probed the Minister on the question raised by Seamus Mallon about the re-establishment of channels with PIRA; the Prime Minister's response in the House had been that neither he or his Ministers had any contact and this had been seen by Mr Trimble as a confirmation that there were other contacts. Sir John said that he could not comment on what the Irish Government were up to but he could assure Mr Trimble and Mr Maginnis that no one under the authority of a Minister has been meeting with Sinn Fein on security/political other than the listening meeting which NIO officials had had (and this had been well publicised).

6. Sir John broached the subject of the Decommissioning Bill; when would the Unionists prefer it to be forthcoming? Mr Trimble agreed that, first of all, the Decommissioning Bill should be treated quite separately from the Elections Bill. Both Trimble and Maginnis said that there was no perfect answer and Trimble had reservations about putting legislation on decommissioning through during an election campaign. Mr Trimble said that his reason for pushing for early legislation was to pressurise the Irish into showing "the colour of their money" as they had given the $\frac{3}{4}$ of an undertaking to legislate (well actually they had given a full undertaking but he had detracted $\frac{1}{4}$ because of the source it came from). Mr Trimble was particularly cognisant of the Minister's point that if we pass legislation in advance of talks there is a danger that it may not be appropriate for suit what agreement emerges on decommissioning. After some discussion it was agreed that HMG could exert maximum pressure on the Irish by publishing a Decommissioning Bill but leaving off putting it through Parliament until a suitable time. Ken Maginnis said that would allow the Unionists to ask the Irish when they were going to publish their Bill. The Minister said that he would give consideration to this proposal and Mr Steele would be liaising with the Irish on Friday; he would also be checking Dail recess times so that excuses could not be used.

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Parades

7. The Minister said that because of the heightened security situation, dove tailing with a sensitive political situation, he knew that Sinn Fein/PIRA were looking for any excuse to draw Unionists and the RUC into conflict. Intelligence indicated that Sinn Fein were working busily on whipping up discontent over the parades issue and this was a key pressure point in which it was important to avoid conflict. Mr Trimble said that he was very worried about the parades issue and he wished to approach it in a co-operative spirit. What was the forthcoming difficulties and how could the unionist leadership help?

8. Mr Steele explained that the first point of difficulty was the Ormeau Road on Easter Tuesday. Local people were concerned about Sinn Fein pressure and outsiders being bussed into the area. Mr Steele believed that the Orange Order might consider publicising its compromises up front, for example, on the Ormeau Road each one of the 3 institutions could have one march through there. Mr Trimble said that there was a worrying silence from his District Officers in Portadown and an indication that positions might be hardening. He would look to see what influence he could use for a compromise ie could the march be 5 or 6 abreast, thus shortening the column and the time it would take to put a march through the area. He also suggested that it would be helpful if the police presence could be scaled down. Mr Steele pointed out that the Government could have no influence on police presence as this was based on an operational assessment by the RUC of whether or not they had a rock solid deal. David Trimble said that he would use his influence to look for compromises but the problem is that they were expecting a massive influx of visitors; he would like to limit it to the local brethren but there are at least 1000 of them. There are also difficulties with the Spirit of Drumcrea group (otherwise known as the SODS) holding a conference and rumours leaking out from the RUC about the possibility of a ban which heightened tension. Frankly, Mr Trimble thought that there would be mayhem if the march was to be banned. Mr Steele and the Minister of State pointed out that there was no intention of Ministers exercising their power to ban but the

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RUC of course, had banning and re-routing powers and on that operational judgement the Government could not and would not seek to influence.

9. Mr Trimble took on board the Ministers insistence that what he was trying to do was help people to protect their traditions and avoid Sinn Fein/PIRA having an excuse for conflict with the Orangemen and the RUC. However, it was difficult for Mr Trimble to see what compromises were available; the Orangemen had been re-routed to Garvaghy Road in the first place, they had given up 6 parades and were trying to hold on to one church parade.

Border Roads

10. Mr Maginnis said that he was getting angrier at the insistence on repairing Border Road Bridges which are never used while important local roads lie in such disrepair. He was not open to the argument that this was NIO money as opposed to DOE money as it all came from the Northern Ireland vote. Even though the Minister explained that if the money was not spent on Bridge repair it would probably go to priorities within the NIO and not be transferred to the DOE. Sir John also pointed out that, confidentially, new technology took away much of the need for visible border restrictions. David Trimble picked up on this point and said that he understood that the Republic of Ireland had difficulty having help and receiving 'kit' from the United Kingdom. He wondered, politically, if it would be more acceptable for the ROI to accept such assistance from the United States ("if Clinton could do this for Israel he could do it for the ROI"). The Minister sees merit in Mr Trimble's suggestion and would be grateful if Mr Steele could provide a suitable draft to No 10 making this suggestion copied to the Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary. On the bridge issue the Minister said that he would like a review undertaken by SPOB to assess whether the work requires to be done.

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11. Mr Trimble acknowledged that he was pleased with reports of the Ministers meeting with Jim Nicholson. He was however concerned about the Secretary of State's decision to appoint [REDACTED]. On a wider note and with the Minister's personnel hat on he wondered how people like [REDACTED] enter the Civil Service and if there is a cross fertilization between the Civil Service and these voluntary groups with the ethos and political impartiality of the Civil Service be corrupted. The Minister acknowledged Mr Trimble's point; he could not comment on individuals but was grateful that Mr Trimble acknowledged the high ethical and professional stance of the Civil Service which he, with his DFP responsibilities, would seek to maintain.

Summary

12. Mr Trimble was in very approachable and friendly form. His undertakings to use influence on the parades issue might be taken with a pinch of salt. However, he was using compromise language and the fact that he sees the importance of doing so might be significant. The other key point to note is that the unionists have taken on board the fact that decommissioning legislation may need to take account of developments in talks and are only pushing for an early publication of our Bill not its enactment.

Signed

PAUL A JOHNSTON
PS/Sir John Wheeler

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