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5 July 1993

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Assistant Secretary

A meeting took place here this afternoon on parades. A detailed report of the meeting will be available but I should like to mention the main points.

John Steele opened the meeting on behalf of the British side by making a few general remarks. He drew the distinction between the banning of parades which was a function of the Secretary of State and the re-routing of parades which was the responsibility of the RUC. The RUC were particularly sensitive about the parades issue this year. They had come under serious attack recently from Loyalists (UFF, he said!). Naturally, they wanted to deal with the parades by using normal police methods and without having to resort to plastic bullets. In the current climate where loyalists were saying that Maryfield was determining police decisions, they were particularly anxious not to be seen to be consulting the Secretariat on particular parades routes. He thought, therefore, that we might have a general discussion on the parades issue.

It was pointed out to him that we intended to be quite specific and we did go through a comprehensive list of possible flashpoints drawn up by Mr Kelleher on the basis of local contacts. We said it had been fully accepted some years ago, when Tom King was Secretary of State, that we were entitled to raise specific situations. Apart from anything else, these were matters of security and, indeed, of public order. It was in both our interests that we should provide whatever information we had and give views. In doing so, we would inevitably raise particular routes or other matters that would cause incidents or give rise to a decline of confidence in the police. Moreover, at the end of the day, it was entirely within the discretion of the Secretary of State, although we realised he would wish to be guided by police advice, to ban a parade or event; and we could, if we chose, make a proposal to him to do so. Mr Steele acknowledged these points and it was agreed that the issue might be discussed as in previous years but bearing in mind the heightened concerns of the RUC this year.

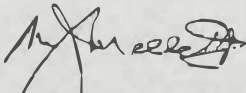
In explaining the present mood of the Loyalist community, Mr. Steele said that Loyalists had lost a lot of ground, geographically speaking. In some instances, what were traditional routes through predominantly Protestant areas were now, in fact, routes through Catholic areas: he did not think the problem marches were necessarily triumphalist; in some cases, they were a defensive reaction.

We said there were more than 2000 parades of one sort or another in Northern Ireland every year, the vast majority of which caused no problem. Sadly, some did; and pending the time when all Orange parades might be regarded as genuine celebrations, even as attractions as they were in some parts North and South, we should assert the principle that in asserting their liberty to march, people should restrain from marching in areas where they were clearly not welcome. That principle had been asserted by Douglas Hurd and Tom King and we regretted that subsequent Secretaries of State had not repeated their view. A balance needed to be struck between the right to public demonstration, the need to respect the rights and sensitivities of others and the imperative of maintaining public order. Orangemen (of the more thoughtful kind) regarded the victory at the Boyne as a victory for civil liberties on behalf of Protestants and Catholics alike. We could understand that but it was all the more incumbent on them not to trample on the liberties of others in commemorating that event. Mr Steele felt that some of these considerations were outside the power of the RUC; they could restrain but they could not impose dignity and decorum. That was a matter for the organisers. We noted in this connection some remarks of Martin Smyth warning Orangemen to beware of provocateurs in their midst. Like the British side, we hoped that the organisers of parades would make their own efforts to ensure dignity and decorum. Why for example were paramilitary-style colour parties allowed to participate in certain Orange parades? There was a law to be upheld in that respect but, more generally, the RUC could make suggestions to the organisers and their power to impose conditions could be used to good effect. Mr Steele noted these comments and said he would take up the matter of paramilitary-style presence in some parades with the RUC. That was a particularly important point.

Lastly, we said we totally accepted the need for sensitivity in dealing with the parades issue but it was important that the RUC did not come up with any surprises like, for example, allowing parades to be re-routed at the last minute through Catholic/Nationalist areas as a concession to loyalist demands. Mr Steele said he would take on board what we had said but he had to be very careful about how he handled our concerns with the RUC. Such were their worries this year that he was unable to give us, at least at this stage, their book of parade routes, as his office had done on a confidential basis and without the knowledge of the RUC (?) in previous years. He asked, in particular, that the handing over the book in previous years not be mentioned to the RUC, for

example, at the Conference. We said we would observe the confidential basis on which the book had been given to us but we urged that the same procedure should apply this year. It was in the interests of the RUC that it should apply again because the detailed evidence in the book of their approach to parades had impressed our side. It had been a factor in our general appreciation of police problems and in our restraint in public statements.

Yours sincerely



M. J. Mellett