



**An Chartlann Náisiúnta**  
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Parades  
Speaking Points

- I thought it would be useful, before the summer marching season gets fully under way, to touch base on the sensitive question of Parades.
- I think that we would all wish to acknowledge the efforts of the RUC in recent years to police parades in a fair and even-handed way;
- Nevertheless, the potential for serious disturbances remains high so long as parades are permitted to pass through areas where they are not welcome. Last year's Orange mini-Twelfth march down the Lower Ormeau Road, on which you commented forthrightly, is an obvious example;
- The joint statement on this issue from the Conference of 27 April last year reiterated the twin principles which should govern the marching season: "the right to demonstrate should be exercised with respect for the rights and sensitivities of others and with regard for the maintenance of public order".
- I hope that these two aspects will be borne fully in mind in preparations for the marching season. I would urge particularly that consideration be given to re-routing parades away from the Lower Ormeau Road, where they are clearly unwelcome to the local community.
- I understand that our officials will shortly meet, with the assistance of the RUC, to review the likely schedule of events and anticipate where trouble may arise. This has been helpful in the past. We should remain in close contact on this issue through the Secretariat in the weeks ahead.

3. The British side's own assessment is that the 1992 marching season had gone well. There were 20 arrests (14 arising out of the Ormeau Road disturbance), 12 attacks on the RUC and 5 injuries. These figures have been dropping since the mid-1980s, we were told.
4. A number of serious issues remain for this year's marching season:

- we insist on the general principle that parades should not take place in an area, or along a route where they are not welcome - a principle which was reflected clearly in former Secretary of State King's remarks in the House of Commons on 19 June 1986: "How does it benefit anyone to march through an area where the inhabitants do not support the views being expressed by the members and where the only result is to exacerbate communal tensions?". We are aware of the Chief Constable's view that decisions on the routing and handling of parades are, in the final analysis, matters for the judgment of the local RUC Commander, but this view must not obscure the principle referred to above, or the objectives of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Joint Statement issued after the 27 April 1992 meeting of the Conference noted that "the right to demonstrate should be exercised with respect for the rights and sensitivities of others and with regard for the maintenance of public order".

- the legal basis for the RUC's power to ban or reroute a parade is found in the 1987 Public Order Order. We are concerned that the Chief Constable tends to prioritise one desideratum of the Order (that is, maintenance of public order before and during a parade, which is achieved at the cost of bottling up nationalist residents), over the power,

explicit in the Order, to prohibit parades where they are "likely to cause....serious disruption to the life of the community". (Art. 5 of 1987 Public Order Order).

- we would hope in particular that decisive action could be taken by the RUC to reroute the contentious Ormeau Road parades this year. It is to be expected that legal challenges to the traditional route down the Ormeau Road will again be mounted;

- the RUC's approach should take full account of areas where demographics have altered the balance in the community. Lower Ormeau Road is one example. Another is Duncairn Gardens in North Belfast, a volatile and vulnerable area which is now essentially nationalist. (Present indications, however, are that as the cycle of parades at Duncairn Gardens is biennial, one will not be held this year). Previous marches in that area have been the causes of substantial rioting. This is in addition to the substantial dislocation and inconvenience caused to local residents by the security measures required to police the march.

Anglo-Irish Division  
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