

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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10 July 1998

Mr Dermot Gallagher
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
HQ

Dear Secretary

Conversation with John Taylor MP and others about Drumcree

John Taylor was a guest at a party at our home yesterday evening.

On arrival, he remarked that "if the march doesn't go through, the Garvaghy Road won't exist after Monday". Taylor commented favourably on the decisions taken in 1996 and 1997, and said that the overall situation in Northern Ireland reminds him of 1974.

I have consulted this morning with another of our guests, the Venerable George Cassidy, the Anglican Archdeacon of London, who as a young man worked in the Cabinet Secretariat at Stormont. Cassidy and his wife witnessed my conversation with Taylor and continued to talk to him when I was distracted by the arrival of other guests. Cassidy confirms that the above remark was made and tells me that Taylor further suggested that "thousands of people will be without a home" if the march fails to go through by Monday. Cassidy believes that the only possible interpretation of Taylor's remarks is that an attempt will be made to burn down the Catholic housing estates on the Garvaghy Road. Cassidy - who is horrified by Taylor's comments - noted that Taylor spoke in a premeditated way and seemed to have prepared his phrases in advance. Taylor did not wait for Drumcree to arise naturally in conversation. Cassidy's conclusion, therefore, is that Taylor was fully sober and intended his warning to me to be reported.

Bill Jeffrey of the NIO, who also spoke with Taylor during the party, told me that Taylor's comment about the Garvaghy Road was similar to something he said during the afternoon to Minister of State Paul Murphy. Jeffrey remarked that Taylor is clearly manoeuvring against Trimble.

Taylor remained at our party for more than three hours and told me later in the evening that he had had an "abrasive" discussion about Drumcree with the Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, Clive Soley. At one point I joined a conversation between Taylor and Patrick Mayhew. Mayhew seemed to be endeavouring to persuade Taylor that the security situation at Drumcree is different now to what it was in 1996. At that time Mayhew was informed on the Wednesday by the General Officer Commanding that the line at the Garvaghy Road could only

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be held by the use of live ammunition. Mayhew and Taylor were in agreement, by the way, that the Conservative leadership has mishandled the Sentences Bill. According to Mayhew the Conservatives' hardline position is as a result of pressure from Michael Howard and has been compounded by the weakness of Andrew Mackay as Shadow Secretary of State.

David McDowell, a Young Unionist who was also among our guests, has heard from friends in Northern Ireland that the word is that up to 100,000 people could converge on Drumcree. He urged us not to underestimate the danger of chaotic violence.

Blair Hall of the US Embassy told me during the party that William Bingham briefed him during the afternoon on the Orange Order's meeting with the Prime Minister yesterday morning. Bingham was unhappy at the outcome. It seems that the Prime Minister discussed with Bingham and his colleagues a scenario involving a meeting between the Order and the residents (or some residents), the establishment of a Civic Forum, and a march in September. Hall did not have further details about the scenario. Bingham made it clear to him, however, that the breaking point in the discussion was that Mr Blair was unable to guarantee a march on a particular day in September. The Prime Minister came across as willing to support such a march as part of a constructive scenario, and he predicted that the residents could be brought around to accepting it. The judgement of Bingham and his colleagues, on the other hand, was that they could hardly hope to make progress in discussions within the Orange leadership unless the September march was guaranteed. It would not be enough for the Orange Order to enter a process of which the end result was merely probable or likely. As of yesterday afternoon, Bingham's intention was to abandon his mediation efforts and concentrate on calming the situation in his own parish of Pomeroy. Blair Hall added that Bingham spoke warmly of his recent meeting with Ambassador Barrington.

Another guest last night was Michelle Gildernew, Sinn Fein's London representative, who was recently elected to the Assembly. Gildernew said that she expects to continue to have a connection with London until Christmas - by which time it should have become clear, she said, whether the Assembly will get off the ground. Gildernew, who spoke in a relaxed and objective way, believes that an accommodation over Orange marches in Portadown is in principle possible. But she emphasised that the residents are still fearful that the RUC will force through the rerouted march. (I took the opportunity to introduce Gildernew to a number of our contacts including Phil Wheatley of the Prison Service, who for some years has been responsible for republican prisoners within the English prison system.)

The Labour Party was strongly represented at our event last night by Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, Jim Dowd, Clive Soley, Norman Godman, Helen Jackson, Mike Gapes and a number of other MPs and advisers. The message we were given was that the Labour Government intends to uphold the rule of law.

Yours sincerely

Philip McDonagh

Philip McDonagh
Counsellor

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