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TO: **Secretary O'Ceallaigh,**
cc. G. Ansbro / F. Mythen.

FROM: **Paul Hickey.**

Copied directly to B. Callaghan, DOJELR.

SUBJECT: Meeting with David Watkins, Stephen Webb, NIO

The Joint Secretary and myself attended a meeting with David Watkins and Stephen Webb of the NIO in Castle Buildings today. The Deputy Joint Secretary and Ms. McGimpsey from the British side of the Secretariat also attended. The primary purpose of the meeting was to review the outcome of the Drumcree related protests and the prospects for the period ahead. A number of other issues including Patten were also raised.

Overall Assessment of Drumcree Protests

The Joint Secretary expressed appreciation for the close co-operation which had been evident between the two sides in the period of the protests. The existence of a channel which had enabled us to draw attention to concerns within the nationalist community during that period was important to the Irish Government. The Joint Secretary also asked for the NIO's assessment of how the Drumcree protests had played out.

Watkins, having adverted to the violence etc. which accompanied the protests as unacceptable, was nevertheless of the view that matters had "in some sense gone remarkably well". He felt that the overall objective - which he described as allowing the Parades Commission and police to "take the strain" in accordance with their statutory functions while avoiding a situation where "middle Ulster" were drawn into support of the Portadown Orangemen - had been achieved. He put this down to a number of factors - the fact that "middle Ulster" had no appetite for a re-run of 1996-98, the RUC's low key handling of the protests which had helped avoid loyalist paramilitary groups becoming "systematically engaged", the existence of the Currin initiative, and Gracie's interventions which themselves were sufficient to alienate many mainstream Orange figures.

They should be encouraged to behave likewise with nationalists

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Implications for the Orange Order

With regard to the Orange Order, Watkins took the view that, while there was clear evidence of fragmentation within Orange ranks, it would be wrong to see recent events as meaning that the Order was "finished". He went on to warn against the triumphalism he detected among some commentators and in the comments of members of residents' groups to that effect. His own impression from the coverage he had seen was of smaller numbers of participants in the Twelfth parades and related activities while also mentioning a view expressed within the NIO that, where the Order had traditionally drawn its members from the (respectable) lower middle class, it had now become a "lumpen order". He referred as well to the Order's traditional role as all embracing with social, political, religious and cultural aspects and suggested that it needed to redefine itself in terms of which of those roles it expected to fulfill. The Order's political complexion had clearly changed and it was in danger of being perceived as being simply anti-progress and anti-Agreement. Webb, with a eye to the historical origins of the Order, also hinted that there would be risks if the Order was to be to disintegrate or retreat into itself which persons of ill-intent would be capable of exploiting. Watkins hinted that the British Government would endeavour to give "discrete" support to "responsible" elements within the Order in attempting to shape the debate which he anticipated. The Joint Secretary adverted to contacts which we had built up with the Order in the context of the development of the Boyne site etc..

Currin Initiative

We also asked for the NIO's assessment of the Currin initiative in the aftermath of recent events. Watkins referred to Gracie's remarks prior to 9/7 that Currin could "pack his bags" in the event of the march not being allowed down the Garvaghy Road but noted that he had not expressed similar sentiments subsequently - "so far as we know the Orange Order has not walked away". He felt that Currin had already done remarkably well "still to be in the saddle" and that keeping him in play would now be important. He was hopeful that Currin would be able to make progress in the coming months while also commenting on the ability of both sides to the Drumcree issue to procrastinate. He finally stressed the importance of Currin's independence which he described as his "greatest virtue" also making the point that the NIO meet him only at his request and not the other way around.

Forthcoming Parades

Watkins had earlier acknowledged that, while the most intense period of parades was now gone, the mid-August parades have yet to come and it was too early to provide a full assessment of the parades period. The Joint Secretary referred in this context to the prospects for the Ormeau Road Parade on 12 August and to the events of last year which all the indications we had received had suggested had been exacerbated by a heavy-handed police response. Watkins was not willing to anticipate the Parades Commission's decision. Webb, however, in subsequent comments which appeared to anticipate a decision in favour of a parade along the Lower Ormeau, stressed the need for understanding of the position facing the RUC. The RUC could not, he stated, in

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delicate handling is needed.

those circumstances allow a situation develop where the protests prevented a parade against the background of a situation where substantial resources had been deployed in Drumcree to prevent a parade. All decisions of the Parades Commission needed to be upheld for the structures to work. The Joint Secretary emphasised the need for both sides to keep in close contact in the period ahead and particularly in the period after the Commission had made a determination.

Loyalist Paramilitaries

The present state of play among the loyalist paramilitary groups was also raised. Watkins stated that a "lot of friction" remains with continuing tensions between the UVF and LVF on one hand and the UVF and UDA on the other. His comments suggested a more serious view of the UVF / LVF feud in that he noted that the UVF were "2 or 3 down" and would feel the need to get "even". Furthermore, they were not the sort of people who would call in Roy Magee until scores had been settled. The LVF remained small but dangerous and were under Adair's influence as increasingly was the UDA in West Belfast. With regard to the UVF / UDA and the potential impact of the Cairns murder, he stated that his understanding was that the murder was the result of "drink and [things] getting out of hand" rather than a planned or sanctioned killing. Their assessment was that the UDA and UVF would continue to engage in a low key turf war but matters could flare up as a result of an incident. There was also a constant danger that an outbreak of intra-loyalist killings would spill over to sectarianism.

Responding to a question from the Joint Secretary regarding recent attacks on Catholic Churches / schools and Orange Halls, Watkins conceded that there was an element of 'direction' on both sides. He put some stress on 'maverick' elements within the leadership of the UDA citing SE Antrim and N Antrim/NW Derry in particular saying that the more mavericks moved into the anti-agreement camp the more difficult they became to control.

Webb also pointed to the possibility of a loyalist response being provoked by a republican dissident attack resulting in a loss of life. He stated that recent attacks such as Stewartstown indicated an increasing recklessness on the part of dissidents and made such a possibility more likely.

Policing Bill / Patten

The Joint Secretary referred to the Secretary of State's comments the previous day on the Policing Bill and expressed concern that the SOS's / NIO's analysis of the position of the parties was fundamentally flawed, particularly if they believed that Mallon was being manipulated or bundled into a position on the Bill by Sinn Fein and that the latter party would inevitably oppose any new policing arrangements . He pointed out that the SDLP had, in fact, been making the running on the Bill and referred also to recent remarks by Martin McGuinness in terms of representing a community which wants policing in the latter regard. He also warned about the dangers of proceeding from a starting point which was fundamentally flawed because it would inevitably

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lead the British to draw the wrong conclusions.

Watkins rejected that characterisation of the NIO position saying that he personally fully accepted that Mallon "was speaking from the heart" in relation to a matter of "passionate interest to him over many years". He also insisted that he retained an "open mind" as regards Sinn Fein's position and was not convinced either way as to the final position they would adopt. More generally he was defensive of the Bill as it had emerged from the Commons as now consistent with the Patten recommendations and took the view that the main outstanding issue was related to name and symbols which he felt was a microcosm of the political conflict in Northern Ireland and would be very difficult to resolve in a way acceptable to both sides.

It was noted in conclusion that a meeting at senior official level had been scheduled, to be follow up by a meeting at Ministerial level, in order to address outstanding difficulties relating to the name, symbols etc. and to the remaining issues of substance.

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