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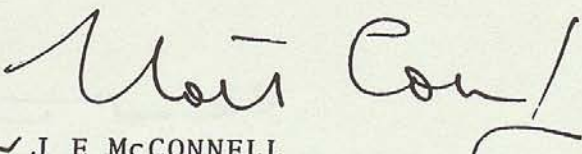
Portadown - 5 May

The Apprentice Boys decided at a lengthy meeting in Londonderry on 27 April to cancel their plans for a march in Portadown on 5 May. This controversial decision - taken by a majority of 16-12 - provoked fierce opposition from extreme Loyalists, including Alan Wright of the Ulster Clubs and George Seawright, who described their action as "cowardice in the face of the enemy", but has been welcomed in all other quarters. Reports indicate that Paisley met the organisations' general committee on 27 April and was instrumental in persuading them to call off the parade.

2. The Apprentice Boys' decision was described by their general secretary John Noble as "no climbdown" but was intended to avoid confrontation and give politicians a breathing space. Presbyterian Moderator Robert Dickinson considered the decision "courageous".

3. The decision does not necessarily mean there will be no marches in Portadown on 5 May. Some members of the Apprentice Boys, together with local hard liners and Seawright supporters are threatening to hold their own parade through the town on that day, though they claim that they will avoid the Catholic Garvaghy Road area where trouble is most likely to occur. It is not clear at this stage how seriously these suggestions should be taken.

4. The Newsletter of 28 April welcomes the Apprentice Boys' decision as a "sensible move" though the tone of the editorial remains fiercely anti-Agreement and anti-SDLP. The Irish News does not comment editorially, but headlines its report "Relief at Portadown parade climb-down".


for J E McCONNELL
Political Affairs Division

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