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PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

THC/4107/98
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From the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff

12 July 1998

- MR WATKINS
- MR STEPHENS

1. Mr McCosker

2. Mr Brown 406/7

CONFIDENTIAL
15.7

Dear Sir,

ORANGE ORDER

The Prime Minister spoke this afternoon to Robbie Saulters of the Orange Order, who was meeting with other senior officials of the Orange Order and David Trimble.

The Prime Minister said it was essential for the Orange Order to call on the Portadown District to leave the hill at Drumcree. If that happened we could carry on with the dialogue to find a solution both for this year and for future years. It would be easier to resolve the problem if the men left the hill. We could not of course give a guarantee that we would be successful in securing a march this year.

Robbie Saulters said that the Orange Order would like a guarantee of a march this year. The date of 21 September had been mentioned. They were worried the dialogue would just drag on for ever. The Prime Minister said that to be blunt it was essential they come off the hill today. If the Orange Order leaders did not call for this it would reflect very badly on the whole Orange Order. Feelings in other parts of the community were very high. He could not give a guarantee that the march would go down. This was not within his gift. But he could promise to resume the talks to find a way of agreeing on a march this year and on marches in future years.

Saulters then asked if the Prime Minister could abolish the Parades Commission. The Prime Minister said this was not possible either. We would work to avoid the problems we had encountered this year but we could not suddenly announce the abolition of the Parades Commission in the aftermath of this awful tragedy.

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Saulters concluded by saying that he and other members of the Grand Lodge would go to Drumcree to persuade the men to get off the hill. He was not convinced that they would be successful but they would try.

*Yours av
J.P. Powell*

JONATHAN POWELL

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Ken Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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