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Prime Minister

NORTHERN IRELAND: THE MARCHING SEASON

As I have twice reported to Cabinet, the temperature in Northern Ireland has been rising in the last fortnight. I am adding this minute because of the relevance to the Anglo-Irish talks.

2. The July/August marching season is always a time of heightened tension. The vast majority of parades take place without incident; a small number - especially "triumphalist" demonstrations through predominantly Catholic areas - lead to outbreaks of violence. In such cases the Chief Constable has used his powers to re-route the parades or, where the organisers have rejected police instructions, he has asked the Secretary of State to impose a ban.

3. This year some Unionist politicians have deliberately seized on the parades issue to demonstrate the solidarity of the Loyalist community in the face of frustration at the failure to cut out Sinn Fein on the Councils and continued terrorist attacks, and more significantly their anxiety about the Anglo-Irish talks. My reassurances about the constitutional position, and the limitations which you and I set on any Anglo-Irish arrangements have not convinced them. Some leaders in the UUP and DUP say that our marches policy is the result of representations made by the Irish Government. They have accused the Chief Constable of trying to enforce "Dublin law".

4. In the circumstances, most Unionists feel they have to rally behind their cause. The behaviour of the DUP has been a disgrace (at least two party members were arrested for breaches of the peace at Castlewellan last week and a local DUP councillor warned police officers that they would be driven from their homes by Loyalist neighbours) and even moderate Unionists find it difficult to break from the "tribal" stance. The Loyalist paramilitary organisations are taking a hand in the protest, although they are watching carefully to see what lead the Unionist and Orange Order

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give. The UDA in particular are seeking to win the support of those who have not been involved in non-political protest since 1977. In turn the minority community see in the handling of marches a crucial pointer to the Government's ability and willingness to govern in an even handed way.

5. I am sure that we must back the Chief Constable's judgement in carrying out what he deems necessary for public order. Any lack of will to demonstrate even handedness would provide Sinn Fein with a ready-made opportunity to argue that constitutional nationalist views cannot prevail. Equally we must give the moderate Unionists evidence that the Government will not countenance lawbreaking under the guise of loyalty to the Crown. The reassurances we can give to Unionists cover our firmly held views on consent to changes in the constitutional status, the supremacy of Parliament, and the nature of our co-operation with Dublin. We shall have to repeat these assurances incessantly.

6. We shall probably face in this situation a number of ugly and violent incidents during the next month, the consequences of which are hard to predict. This is not an argument for halting the discussions with the Irish Government, or an argument against concluding an agreement with that Government if it becomes available. But it does mean that the risks always latent in this policy are coming to the surface. The Irish Government will need to understand that in carrying on the negotiations or later implementing an agreement we henceforth are on a knife edge so far as the acquiescence of the majority is concerned, and that this is bound to influence what we can safely do.

7. I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

5 July 1985

for *Spedding*
DH

(Approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence)

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