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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

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14 July 1986
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Dear Charles,

THE "TWELFTH WEEKEND" : EVENTS SO FAR

The Prime Minister may wish to have an overview of events connected with the 12 July celebrations so far from midnight 10/11 July to 7 am 14 July.

The weekend's events can be said to have begun in Hillsborough just after midnight in the first hour and an half on Friday morning when some 400 cars converged on the village from Portadown, Lurgan and Dungannon. A crowd of about 4000 formed up into organised groups and paraded peacefully up and down the main Street outside Hillsborough Castle. Dr Paisley, Peter Robinson and William McRea were among those present. No leading members of the Official Unionists were there. The RUC and Army, although present, did not seek to intervene. The crowd dispersed without incident at about 1.30 am.

Although Dr Paisley claimed that this was a show of strength and that they had "taken over" the village in defiance of the security forces, police evidence became available later in the day that the demonstrators had originally planned to catch the security forces in Portadown unawares and to march through the Tunnel and Obins Street. However, the large security force presence there had thwarted that plan and the demonstration in Hillsborough was a face-saving exercise in a non-controversial area where the security force presence was minimal. Nevertheless, as Nicholas Scott said on television in the morning, it was a well-executed stunt; but no more than that.

Tension mounted across the Province as the evening of the "Eleventh Night" approached with a number of contentious marches due, and the widespread lighting of symbolic bonfires accompanied by heavy drinking. Various nationalist politicians and priests were in contact expressing fears about loyalist violence likely to be directed against their communities particularly in Portadown and Ballynahinch. These were passed on to the police.

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At 9pm the RUC announced that a route, subject to various conditions, had been agreed with the leaders of the Portadown Orange Lodges for their traditional march on 12 July. By using the good offices of Jim Molyneaux, Martin Smyth and Harold McCusker, the Chief Constable had persuaded the march organisers to agree that only eight "country" lodges would march into Portadown town along the Garvaghy Road - a wide through-road flanked by three large Catholic housing estates and one mainly Protestant mixed estate - to join up with the "town" lodges when they would embark on buses and travel to the main Orange Lodge parade in Armagh City.

This decision led to increased tension among Catholics in Portadown and considerable anger among their spokesmen. The Chief Constable pointed out that his decision honoured his statement of 3 July that there would be no marches through the Tunnel along Obins Street during 12-14 July; it undermined Dr Paisley and Alan Wright of the Ulster Clubs who wanted confrontation; and it was the decision that was likely to lead to the least violence in both communities in the following 24 hours.

There was considerable public disorder across the Province during Friday night and the early hours of Saturday morning. The worst was in Portadown, mainly at the interface between the Protestant Edgarrstown area and the Catholic Obins Street. About 1000 people were involved; 150 plastic baton rounds (PBRs) were fired; 14 policemen and a number of civilians were injured, none seriously. The expected serious attacks on Catholics in Ballynahinch were successfully prevented by the RUC and the Army. Among the other places where violence occurred - more often than not directed by loyalists against the police - were Londonderry, Limavady, Belfast, Lisburn, Larne, Kilkeel and Ballymoney. In total during the night the police fired 186 PBRs and two injured policemen were detained in hospital.

In contrast to the previous night's violence the Saturday 12 July marches passed off with little incident mainly in good humour and a holiday atmosphere. Nevertheless the day's speeches reflected the undiminished opposition of the vast majority of the unionist population to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Portadown march proceeded down the Garvaghy Road strictly according to the conditions imposed by the police and with only token opposition from a few Catholic residents.

There were some disturbances in Portadown and other towns during the late afternoon and evening as the marchers returned but it was generally sporadic hooliganism involving stone throwing by small numbers of youths. A measure of the successful way in which the police handled the day's events is the fact that from 7am Saturday until 7am Sunday only 17 PBRs were fired.

The worst incident of naked sectarianism occurred last night just before midnight in the County Antrim village of Rasharkin when a gang of about 50 men dressed in paramilitary-style clothing and carrying pick handles and cudgels attacked a small Catholic community in this predominantly Protestant area. Homes were broken into and

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badly damaged, parked cars were attacked and one youth was badly beaten. The police report a series of incidents in the area involving mobile gangs from both sides of the community mounting sectarian attacks in the Ballymoney and Kilrea areas. Police investigations are continuing and arrests are expected.

The RUC statistics for this weekend's violence from 7pm on 11 July to 3am on 14 July are 128 policemen injured; 66 civilians injured; 281 PBRs fired and 127 arrests made. This is an unacceptably high level of public disorder reflecting the tension between the communities at this traditionally emotive time of the year in Northern Ireland; and there are still today's marches to come. But the Province is not in the critical state that some had predicted and in most parts of the Province ordinary people have enjoyed the traditional holiday weekend. Despite criticism by nationalist politicians of his handling of the Portadown march, the Chief Constable and the RUC can rightly consider their plans to maintain the peace over this tense period to have been in the main successful. The Secretary of State is encouraged by what he sees as further evidence that the majority of the unionist people abhor the activities of their own hooligan fringe elements and do not see confrontation with the security forces as a way to solving their problems over the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Yours Sincerely
Neil Ward

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