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Meeting on Parades
Secretariat, 6 July 1995

Irish Side

Michael Mellett
Declan Kelleher
Brendan Callaghan

British Side

John Steele
Alan Maitland
Jackie McGimpsey
Martin Williams
Terry Smyth
Ruth Osborne

1. Mr. Steele said that for a number of years, up to the ceasefire, the RUC had done a remarkable job in handling parade flashpoints, through dealing with local inhabitants and the Orange Order. Generally speaking, the problems had been getting less and less. One would have thought that this would continue after the ceasefire. This however was not the case. Sinn Fein was engaging in brinkmanship with the peace process. In this respect, the Clegg case was a godsend to them, although they had been obstructing parades before the Clegg release. At their meeting this morning with Michael Ancram, the loyalist parties had expressed themselves very worried about the next two weeks. Sinn Féin were refusing to talk to the British Government. They had taken matters to the streets and were trying to draw the RUC into confrontation. They appeared to want the RUC to take action against loyalist parades and have pictures in the media of the RUC pushing women and children off the road. An example was the previous night's parade on the Ormeau Road (the mini-Twelfth). There had been no intention of the parade going down the Lower Ormeau Road, but the upshot of the protests against the parade was that loyalists ended up stoning the RUC. He did not understand Sinn Féin's rationale. They were destabilising the situation significantly and this might cause a loyalist reaction. It was a risky strategy. The

Clegg release would clearly have a political effect for a while. But the unrest of the past few days could not have lasted without organisation. He asked that the Irish Government use their influence on Sinn Féin, suggesting that a Minister press Sinn Féin. (Mr. Mellett has reported separately on this aspect).

2. Mr. Mellett said that Sinn Féin had denied that they were orchestrating events, which perhaps was to be expected. The Irish Government constantly urged moderation on all groups. The Government and the Tánaiste had recognised the good work of the RUC in defusing parade flashpoints. The parades season was always a high risk period and was particularly so this year. The level of unrest had not been decreasing since Monday, in spite of media reports. We were very conscious of the heightened risks.
3. Mr. Steele said that his side would be unable to provide us with a copy of the RUC parades document. The reason for not giving us the document in the last two years still applied. The RUC were sensitive concerning how they handled parades. They did not want any impression getting around that they were influenced by either Government. He handed over on a confidential basis details of some of the parades which we had flagged up as of interest to us.

Lower Ormeau

4. Mr. Kelleher said that there had been progress on parades in this area over the past three years and in the course of this year. We had noted the contribution of senior RUC officers to this improvement. The Irish Government had used its influence on nationalist groups to avoid triumphalism and to reach out to the Orangemen. We are aware of the Quakers' mediation efforts. The Lower Ormeau Concerned Community group (LOCC) had, we understand, put forward some suggestions to the Orange

Order, e.g. an Orange feeder on the Twelfth by invitation/agreement, a moratorium on parades until 1997, exhibitions on Orangeism to be held in the Lower Ormeau. Mr. Steele said that it was hard to get across to the Orange Order that there was anything in it for them. The RUC believed that the Orange Order would not use the Lower Ormeau again, unless there was a change of heart by the local residents. Things had been going well up to last year. Residents had been turning a blind eye to some parades, and the RUC had been forcing the Orangemen on to alternative routes, e.g. the Embankment.

5. Mr. Kelleher said that the mini Twelfth, rerouted for the last two years away from the Lower Ormeau, was presumably no longer an issue. Even so, the Lower Ormeau residents had homed in on the uncertainty as to the decision making process on routings. Did the fact that the police make decisions on public order criteria mean that in the last analysis rerouting depended on the number of people on the street opposing a parade? The likelihood of, if not a riot, then a noisy and substantial counterdemonstration is seen locally in the Lower Ormeau as necessary to ensure re-routing, even in the case of the mini-Twelfth and despite the fact that it had been rerouted for the last two years. This is a problem which seems to be inherent in the prevailing interpretation by the RUC of the public order legislation and we have drawn attention to it on numerous occasions. On the positive side, the Lower Ormeau leadership had made clear over recent weeks that they did not want confrontation between the community and the RUC. There appeared to be a good level of pre-dialogue with the RUC and stewarding, to which the Quakers, inter alios, had attested: in general, a relatively restrained and non-triumphalist approach, which we and others had encouraged. Mr. Steele said that RUC use of the powers of the Public Order Order had been tested by judicial review on a number of occasions. Both

nationalists and loyalists were aware of the possibilities of judicial review.

6. Mr. Steele said that the organisers of the Twelfth and mini Twelfth parades understood why they were disruptive. However, they could not understand why church parades, which consisted of one or two Lodges, could not go down the road. They saw the protests as Sinn Féin inspired. An extra niggle was that the Lower Ormeau used to be Protestant territory.

7. In response to a question from Mr. Kelleher, Mr. Steele said that it was not his job to say how the feeder parade on the Twelfth itself was developing. That was a job for the RUC, who were aware of alternative routes and of the views of the march organisers and the local residents. However, as far as he knew, the RUC had no intention of forcing any parade down the Lower Ormeau. He had virtually been told that the intention was not to have any more Orange parades on the Road. He asked that the local residents not be told of this. However, in arriving at this situation something had been lost. Possible compromises, e.g. a parade down a small portion of the Road, had been pushed off the agenda as a matter for negotiation. Mr. Steele said it was clear from this morning's meeting between Michael Ancram and the loyalists that they were concerned about this and that their hard men were even more concerned. Mr. Kelleher wondered about differences of emphasis between the two Loyalist groupings. Mr. Steele said that elements in the PUP, socialistic and agnostic, were less warm about the Orange Order than were the UDP.

Whiterock

8. Mr. Kelleher said that the routing of this parade, whose point of access to the Nationalist Springfield Road from the Shankhill has gradually been moved further and

further up the Springfield Road in recent years (thus diminishing the parade's passage through Nationalist areas), is not at present intrinsically a flashpoint. The issue now is seen as a problem on its way to a gradualist solution through progressive rerouting. It had been a flashpoint in the past notably two years ago, when UVF objections to the then rerouting resulted in the death of a UVF paramilitary who blew himself up with his own grenade. The SDLP had been critical of the opportunistic Sinn Féin protests during the recent parade, but were also critical of the way nationalists, including SDLP members, had been treated by the RUC men on the ground. Another source of criticism was the RUC use of screens. There would be a repeat parade on the Twelfth, and the recent mistakes on various sides should be avoided. There is also the vulnerability of some nationalist enclaves further up the Springfield Road to attack from Forth River.

9. Mr. Steele said that he was concerned about the behaviour of Sinn Fein on this occasion and commented that the local community, if it was left up to them, would let the parade through.

Portadown

10. Mr. Steele said that while the situation had softened considerable in recent years it had potential for trouble this year. Mr. Kelleher said that the local Nationalist community had in recent years tended to resign itself reluctantly, after a token protest, to the routing of the return leg of the Drumcree parade along the Nationalist Garvaghy Road on the Sunday before the Twelfth (this year on 9 July), which was seen as a consolation prize to the Orangemen for the restrictions on the main Twelfth route (Obins Street) since 1987. The lengthy and circuitous return route along the nationalist Garvaghy Road was seen as an exercise in coat-trailing. There would be a

Garvaghy community-based tendency to protest this year and not just confined to Sinn Fein, as the RUC appeared to imply in the documentation which Steele had just passed over. Mr. Steele said that he found it chilling that the RUC were saying that they would deploy enough MSUs to control the situation. This meant lots of policemen. There was no mention of compromises. The RUC were acting as honest broker. Mr. Kelleher said that the local community had indicated that they had in fact put forward two compromise routes, which however were not likely to be accepted. Mr. Maitland said that our views had been passed on the RUC, who were aware of alternative routes. Mr. Kelleher said that our information was that the local Orangemen had declined to respond to the local Nationalist community's outreach and suggestions. Mr. Kelleher added that the Garvaghy Road Residents Group is a broad church, not without internal differences of emphasis, but focussed and keen to remain representative of the local community.

Other Locations

Bellaghy

11. Mr. Kelleher said that the parade this year on 5 July had been bigger than usual, with 40 bands and elements from outside. Mr. Steele said that the trouble had not been too bad, consisting of stone throwing at the RUC by loyalists.

Limavady

12. Mr. Kelleher recalled that in recent years the problems in Limavady appeared to have been resolved. It was unfortunate therefore to hear of renewed complaints from reliable quarters at the number of Friday night parades which conflict with Mass times. These were Orange parades which attracted hangers on of a lager lout type. We had noticed that the Orange Order continue to deny that Loyalist camp followers are in any way their

responsibility. Mr. Steele agreed that the Orangemen took the attitude that if Orangemen were not involved it was not their concern. Their approach to stewarding was very formal. The RUC took a different approach - they concentrated on the hangers on.

13. Mr. Kelleher said that the parades in Moy caused a traffic problem.

14. Mr. Steele said that he would look into the situation in Limavady and Moy. Mr. Steele said that loyalist bands tended to go out marching at this time of the year and in so doing attracted an undesirable element. Mr. Kelleher recalled the improvements in relation to marches and bonfires in Ballynahinch, Killyleagh and Shrigley in recent years. These had been well noted by local nationalists.

Garvagh

15. Neither Mr. Kelleher nor Mr. Steele anticipated problems.

Newry

16. Mr. Steele said that the RUC had flagged up Newry as having potential for trouble, perhaps as a result of their problems in the town some time ago.

17. Mr. Steele said that their list of flashpoints and problem areas was broadly similar to ours. He found the meetings such as this useful in that they provided an opportunity for him to focus on the specific problems.

B. Callaghan

7 July, 1995

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