



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Briefing on upcoming marching season

26 June 1996

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1. A meeting was held in the Secretariat on 26 June to discuss flashpoint parades which could arise between now and the end of the main marching season in mid-August. Present on the Irish side were K. Dowling (who chaired the meeting in the absence, in Castle Buildings, of the Joint Secretary), S. Magner, E. McKee and the undersigned.
2. Present on the British side were Under Secretary John Steele and Jackie McGimpsey (NIO) and P. Bell, J. Fisher and R. Osborne from the Secretariat.

3. Summary

- The British side maintained that Sinn Féin had made a policy decision in the post-Manchester context to use the opportunity provided by the marching season to destabilise the situation in Northern Ireland.
- The British side maintained that the "tour of the north" parade on 21 June had turned out better than might have been expected and had also "strengthened" the RUC hand in regard to being able to take a different (i.e. re-routing decision) on other forthcoming parades.
- The Irish side argued that nationalists of all hues had legitimate concerns about certain parades. Moderate figures on the nationalist side had been dissuaded from remaining involved in the campaign against the parades because they did not want to be associated with Sinn Féin. Contentious parades were a serious threat to the entire texture of community relations.
- The British side were pessimistic about the prospects for compromise at this year's "flashpoint" parades.

- While refusing to predict how the police would deal with individual parades, the British side said there was a willingness on their part to contemplate the deployment of troops to restore order if serious disturbances occur. Their policy at present is one of getting through the summer of 1996 without serious civil disorder erupting as a result of contentious parades.
  - The British side provided us with a list of the parades which they believed were likely to cause serious difficulties. (Appendix 1).
4. Dowling opened by welcoming Steele and McGimpsey, indicating that it was timely on the eve of the main marching season to have an exchange of views on the likely flashpoint parades. As regards the structure of the meeting, he said that it would be useful, first, to have an assessment from Steele of the disturbances the previous Friday's "Tour of the North" parade; in seeking such an assessment, we would acknowledge that the RUC had, on the whole, behaved with considerable restraint on the occasion, but it was also the case that certain of the MSUs (mobile support units) had perhaps acted over energetically.

The meeting might then work through the list of individual flashpoint parades likely to arise in the period to mid-August. Looking beyond the immediate marching season it would also be useful to have a brief discussion on how the NIO/RUC might intend to approach the question of parades in the medium and longer term.

He added that it would be desirable for the two sides to remain in very close and regular contact through the current marching season. While the Tánaiste had received considerable representations, and not least from more moderate nationalist elements, urging him to take a strong public stance on the whole issue of parades, there had been a deliberate reluctance on the Irish side to say anything that might exacerbate an already fraught situation. This was in line with the approach indicated by the Tánaiste at the last IGC.

Steele said that the British side acknowledged the helpful approach of the Irish

Government. The constant charge levelled against the British Government had been that it was "taking its instructions from Dublin" on parades issues and instructing the RUC accordingly.

5. Steele also congratulated the Garda Síochána for "a terrific piece of work" in Co. Laois, though he commented that the British side were worried about the implications of the bomb factory find.

#### **Recent events and prospects for the coming season**

6. Steele provided the Irish side with the British list of expected flashpoints for 1996 which is attached. Referring to the events at the "tour of the north" parade through the Cliftonville Road the previous Friday (21 June), Steele said that the parade had not turned out as badly as might have been expected. Disturbances could have been worse and had stopped when the media departed. The outcome had to some extent justified the decision to allow the parade - in that it strengthened the police hand in any possible decision it might take to re-route or ban parades in the weeks ahead. The Protestant paramilitaries had maintained tight control over the activities of the "hangers-on" who might otherwise have made the situation worse.

As regards the MSUs, he believed that the units concerned - specially trained as they are in removing seated protestors from the road quickly, but without heavy-handedness - had handled the situation very well. There were now more trained personnel available within the police for this type of work than was the case in 1995.

McKee said that while restraint had been shown by police officers in difficult circumstances, there had been evidence of some very aggressive police tactics and that no attempts were made to engage in mediation. Images of such aggression did not help the relationship between the police and the nationalist community.

Steele replied that the RUC had decided "to get it over with" on the grounds that

mediation might have led to a protracted stand-off. The British side were not however ruling out mediation work a priori.

McGimpsey said that the mediators had been warned by the IRA not to intervene. McKee said that while the Mediation Network had mentioned to our side that there had been difficulties in finding authoritative spokespersons with whom to mediate, they had not mentioned IRA intimidation as a factor.

McKee emphasised the widespread concern that existed in nationalist areas about the marching issues. Many moderate voices who were opposed to parades were reluctant to get directly involved in the issue because of Sinn Féin's involvement. McGimpsey agreed that this was the case, referring to the resignation of some members of the Cliftonville/Antrim Road Concerned Residents Group in protest against Sinn Féin's involvement.

7. On a more general note, Steele remarked that the high profile of Sinn Féin members such as Gerry Kelly at the Cliftonville parade reflected a conscious policy decision by the party in the post-Manchester climate to orchestrate trouble. This had coincided with a decline in the role of moderates in local anti-parade groups.

Dowling responded that there was no denying that Sinn Fein were active on the parades front. However, as the Tánaiste had reiterated at the last IGC, the parades issue was of considerable concern to the nationalist community as a whole.

Steele accepted this point, adding that "many unionists don't like parades either". The issue would be difficult to resolve outside the context of agreement on overall political structures for the North. He added that recent years had seen a drift away from the "middle-class" ethos of the Orange Order to a more troublesome and militaristic flavour. The thrust of British Government efforts in recent months had been to try to persuade Orange leaders to take the moral high ground by adopting well-publicised compromise positions. The Orange groups had pointed to two difficulties - the disparate lodges were not under central

control, and any compromises made were difficult to publicise because of the effect such a perceived climb-down might have on their members.

Steele added that the Orange lodges believed that they had indeed made compromises ( i.e. in Drumcree, there had been a reduction from seven parades a year, both to and from the church service, to one parade in one direction only). Their perception was that any concessions they had made were “pocketed” and met with demands for further concessions. This was linked to the perception that the wider political process was also going against them.

#### **Likely flashpoints for the upcoming season.**

##### **Whiterock 29 June**

9. Steele said that his “guess” would be that the parade scheduled for the Whiterock Road on Saturday 29 June would probably go ahead, and that any demonstration would be “contained” by the police. The situation in Whiterock had hardened due to what they again identified as Sinn Féin orchestration. McKee underlined the deep concern on the Irish side about the possibility of serious confrontation at Whiterock.

##### **Lower Ormeau 30 June**

10. Steele said that he did not expect that this parade would be allowed to use the Lower Ormeau Road.
11. Speaking of the LOCC, Steele commented that he had met the group privately on two occasions and that there had been a distinct difference in tone between the first meeting, at which the group appeared open to suggestions for compromise (such as an agreement to allow three parades use the road, without music and with an authorised peaceful protest), while at the second meeting the group wanted a complete ban on parades in the area. While the matter was ultimately one for the police and the parties to the dispute, Steele was pessimistic about the

willingness to compromise at this flashpoint.

**7 July: (i) Ormeau Road and (ii) /Garvagh Road**

12. While refusing to predict what the police decision in respect of either parade might be, Steele said that the worst possible outcome in the event that both parades were re-routed would be a protracted stand-off that might stretch to the 12 July period. At a time when RUC staff resources were stretched to their absolute limit, it would be necessary to deploy soldiers to ensure public order. Little mediation was taking place in Portadown and the local view remained that last year's parade had been allowed on the understanding that it was the last.

McKee pointed to the potentially catastrophic effect the redeployment of soldiers could have on Northern Ireland's fragile security situation. Steele accepted this point, but said that soldiers had been training for possible deployment during the marching season.

13. McKee asked if the British side had any indication of what loyalist paramilitary intentions were in relation to the Garvagh Road. Steele replied that it had emerged that loyalists had intended to be provocative in 1995. Their intention had been to entice marchers to use Oban Street on their return trip, which, as events transpired, never actually took place.
14. Magner asked Steele if he could confirm that elements in the Orange Order were planning a large-scale blockade of Portadown. Steele said he could not confirm this; he had, however, seen a video recording of a "spirit of Drumcree" meeting in the Ulster Hall, which he had found "very frightening". He could not discount the possibility of extensive rioting in loyalist East Belfast also, should the situation in Portadown deteriorate.
15. Steele expressed the hope that the RUC would let their decision on Portadown be known "well in advance" and predicted that they would do so if at all possible. Magner asked if there was a danger that announcing a decision that was not favourable to the loyalist side in advance might leave control in the hands of the

less legitimate elements who would show up on the day. Steele pointed out that the police retained the power to stop such groups from travelling to the areas where the disputes were taking place.

16. McKee accounted for the failure of the Police Liaison Committees to have a positive impact on the situation by pointing to the hardline DUP element on them. He added that the Garvaghy residents group had not had any involvement with Martin Meehan of Sinn Féin and were truly representative of local feeling on the issue.
17. Steele said that there remained the hope that pressure from families and friends, which was a strong feature of life in the North, might deter Orange members from involving themselves in such a potentially dangerous situation as Portadown.
18. In relation to the likely approach David Trimble would take to the Garavaghy Road parade, Steele said that at a constructive meeting he had had with Trimble, the latter had indicated that he would attend the church service at Drumcree, but would not be involved in the parade. Steele remarked that Trimble may have realised the error of his ways in relation to his performance at Drumcree in 1995. Dowling responded that whatever about the negative long-term impact of Trimble's action on that occasion, his behaviour then had helped ensure his election as party leader. As to whether a meeting between Trimble and the Garaghy Road residents should usefully be encouraged, Steele replied that any discussion between the two sides would be of benefit.

#### **Dunloy 11, 12 July**

19. McKee said that while the Dunloy parades tended to pass off without serious violence, they were causing enormous damage to the fabric of community relations in the area. Orange bands had engaged in provocative antics in the predominantly nationalist village. (The British side identified Dunloy as a potential flashpoint in the list that they provided at the meeting).

**12 July: (i) Garvaghy Road and (ii) Lower Ormeau**

20. Steele said that the Lower Ormeau parade posed serious difficulties, and that there was an acute need for a compromise deal to be negotiated (as he put it, it would be extremely helpful if agreement could be reached on the parade). He expected that the 12 July Garvaghy Road parade would be cancelled this year (as was the case in 1995).
21. As regards the parades on the Lower Ormeau Road and on the walls of Derry on 10 August, Steele suggested that it was as yet too early to predict how these would develop, as this would depend very much on events in the marching season between now and then. He predicted that the new mayor of Derry, Richard Dallas - who is himself a member of the Apprentice Boys - would not want to have his period in office sullied by major disturbances.

**Conclusion**

22. As regards possible medium or long-term solutions to the marching season problems, Steele, who is a member of a sub-group of NIO Security Division set up to examine the issue, said that the British side did not believe a Parades Tribunal would provide the answer. The Northern Ireland Judiciary had already indicated their reluctance to get involved in an issue which they do not see as being their responsibility. The British side were considering setting up a Commission in the winter of 1996 to take submissions from all concerned with a view to compiling a coherent set of guidelines for the conduct of parades. The short-term objective at this stage was to "get through to the end of August" without serious civil disorder erupting in Northern Ireland with all the negative implications that would have for the wider political situation. In an informal remark after the meeting had concluded, Steele indicated that his personal belief was that the IRA remained an extremely cohesive organisation that was very much on a war footing.

M. Tierney  
27 June 1996

Appendix IBritish list of likely flashpoints 1996

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENTS</b>	<b>FLASH POINTS</b>
29/6/96	No 9 District Whiterock	Springfield Road
30/6/96	Battle of Somme Parades Ulster Hall	Ormeau Road
3/7/96	No 10 District Ballynafeigh	Maybe to Bridge only - Ormeau Road
7/7/96	Drumcree and other areas	Portadown
11/7/96	Local Band	Dunloy
12/7/96	Twelfth of July Parades	19 venues incl Ormeau Rd
13/7/96	RBP incl Sham fights Scarva	Portadown & Lurgan
10/8/96	Apprentice Boys Demo Londonderry	Ormeau Road Dunloy (App Boys) Londonderry
11/8/96	Internment	West Belfast
15/8/96	AOH	Across the province

25/8/96	RBP	Ormeau Road
31/8/96	RBP parades to demonstration in Carrickfergus	Ormeau Road Dunloy
8/9/96	Orange Church Service	Dunloy
27/10/96	Belfast county LOL Parades - Reformation Service - Ulster Hall	Ormeau Road
14/12/96	Shutting the gate of Derry	Londonderry
14/12/96	RBP parade	Lower Ormeau Road