



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/50/113

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Meeting between
Taoiseach and Northern Ireland Resident Groups
in Leinster House.

Wednesday, 17 July 1996, 3 p.m.

The Government side comprised the Taoiseach, Mr. Donlon, Mr. McKee (D/Foreign Affairs) and Mr. Cribbin. The Residents Groups were represented by Gerry Rice and John Gormley (Lower Ormeau Concerned Community), Brendan McCionnaith (Garvaghy Residents Coalition) and Caoimhín Ó Murchú and Margaret Gallagher (Bogside Residents). The meeting lasted over an hour and key exchanges were as follows:

- The **Taoiseach** opened the meeting by emphasising his deep concern over recent events. In relation to the Garvaghy Road situation, it was 'very seriously wrong' of the British Authorities to have conceded 'to numbers of people on foot'. The fashion in which it was done was 'very disquieting' for Nationalists, creating the clear perception that the greater force and threat holds the greater sway. A similar consequence was effected by the handling of the Lower Ormeau Road situation. The **Taoiseach** emphasised his awareness from first hand accounts of the 'very rough treatment which had been meted out'. Turning to the Apprentice Boys march in Derry on 10 August, he suggested that an opportunity might exist for a higher standard to be set than that which prevailed in Portadown and the Lower Ormeau Road. The majority in Derry are the minority in Northern Ireland and the reversal of roles there might enable Nationalists to further elevate their high moral arguments on the more contentious Orange Parades elsewhere.

- **Gormley** expressed 'the very deep appreciation of Nationalists' for the Taoiseach's remarks following the RUC u-turn on Drumcree. Nationalists had been at 'a very low ebb'. Their feelings of 'desertion', bruising' and the 'RUC having failed us' are still there. An 'almost universal view' now exists amongst nationalists that the RUC should be disbanded and replaced. He described as 'nonsense' some assertions by British Government ministers that the Drumcree crisis was precipitated by two immovable and entrenched forces. All the Groups present had tried on many occasions to reach compromises with the Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys as appropriate. Position papers had been sent, mediators had been engaged but the response could fairly be described as non-cooperation in any shape or form. The Groups present 'absolutely accept the right to march but such marches must be sensitive to local demographic changes'.

- Regarding the Lower Ormeau Road, **Gormley** said that due account should have been taken of population changes twenty years ago while in Derry, the giving of 'that bit of the Walls to the Apprentice Boys was a crazy decision'. **Gallagher** added that the Apprentice Boys 'walk up the Bogside walls and down again' - an unnatural route to the Memorial Hall. Marching on that section of the Walls is 'a violation of Nationalist rights, it is antagonistic'. Nationalists have no problem however with parades on the Walls at the Fountain area. **Ó Murchú** said that all attempts to communicate with the Apprentice Boys concerning the 10 August parade had been ignored including offers to work through mediators.
- The **Taoiseach** queried whether the lack of response from the Apprentice Boys could be due in part to the fact that many of them are not local. **Ó Murchú** said that the local Apprentice Clubs are involved but events at Drumcree in particular seem only to have stiffened the resolve.
- **McCionnaith** said that in relation to the Garvaghy Road, both **Ronnie Flanagan** and **Blair Wallace** had assured **Brendan McAllister** from *Mediation Network* last year that there would be no more marches through the Garvaghy Road without local consent. **Rice** added that they had informed **Ronnie Flanagan** that two parades through the Lower Ormeau could be agreed provided one was not permitted through the Garvaghy Road. They had gone to 'great lengths' to reach agreement on parades with the Orange order, endeavouring to make one parade (and perhaps two) acceptable but not seventeen.
- When the **Taoiseach** suggested that while no parades without local consent was a reasonable position to adopt at one level, it could be used as a veto at another level, the delegation responded that 'Orange triumphalism needs to be trimmed', marches where they are not welcome 'poison communities', the Orange order 'has to be made look at the bigger picture' and in any event, only re-routings of a very small number of parades (not bans) are being sought. The **Taoiseach** assured the delegation that he and his Government colleagues feel a 'very deep sympathy' for the communities concerned and are very anxious to do whatever they can to help improve the situation.
- **McCionnaith** said that the British Government's proposed review of marches is worthless to Nationalists because the RUC command no confidence whatsoever. There is a need now to internationalise the review and monitoring of all Orange marches and in that regard, the involvement of EU observers should be considered. **Gormley** added that a further consequence

3

of recent events was that much damage had been done to the whole mediation process. McAllister was personally devastated by the Garvaghy Road situation and efforts to secure the involvement of mediators in future had been made much more difficult.

- **Gormley** continued by saying that during the four and a half days following the decision to allow the Orange march through the Garvaghy Road, the RUC had fired 662 plastic bullets at Loyalists. The equivalent number fired at Nationalists during two and a half days was 5340. While he totally opposed the use of all plastic bullets, these figures clearly show the imbalance of treatment on the part of the RUC. **McCionnaith** added that 'salt was further rubbed into Nationalist wounds by roadblocks being manned by the UDR' (now RIR).
- **McCionnaith, O Murchú and Rice** gave quite graphic descriptions of police actions on the Garvaghy Road and in the Bogside. Women were baton charged; the casualty unit in Altnagelvin Hospital was attacked by RUC personnel in riot gear; reporters had cameras taken from them; limbs were broken; even skulls were fractured; one man in Derry who was struck by two plastic bullets has suffered brain damage; an SDLP councillor, Martin Morgan, would have been arrested by the RUC had they not been stopped by the intervention of Deputy Joe Costelloe. They added that the presence of the three TD's (O Cúiv, Costelloe and Bree) undoubtedly saved people from more serious injury.
- **McKee** assured the delegation that many of the cases mentioned by the delegation are presently being pursued under the Anglo-Irish Agreement framework and a number would be on the agenda for the AIIC meeting on the following day. The RUC were described by the Resident Groups at various points throughout the meeting as 'shameful', 'horrendous', 'behaving like a pack', 'blatantly one-sided' and 'acting at the behest of Orange Order wishes'. The Groups were united in the view that these sentiments are representative of the entire Nationalist community irrespective of class or political outlook - 'I have never seen a more united Catholic response', said **Rice**. **McCionnaith** said that 'there is no Nationalist input to the RUC - there is only a Catholic Unionist input of around eight per cent'. The **Taoiseach** reassured the delegation that the Government fully understand the depth of Nationalist anger over the RUC's behaviour. The ultimate key to a satisfactory resolution lay in 'a political settlement that would enable a balanced police composition to be achieved'.

- 4
- **Gormley** responded that 'police reform now needs to be pushed up the agenda'. There is a need for 'an international based inquiry into the events of the past four weeks'. The **Taoiseach** responded that obviously, British Government co-operation would have to be secured. He said that he 'will look into it - there is no use in having an inquiry if it is one-sided'. The Government are trying to move on a number of fronts. In the multi-party talks, they are trying very hard to speedily progress matters from procedural to substantive issues. Efforts are continuing to secure a restoration of the IRA ceasefire to enable Sinn Féin play its part, thus helping to diffuse the present tension. The issues of policing and parades are being tackled. **McKee** added that in relation to the latter two issues in particular, the process begins with the Intergovernmental Conference meeting on the following day.
 - The **Taoiseach** said that he fully understands and appreciates the Nationalist sense of outrage. He personally had never been so hard on another Government Leader as he had been with John Major following the Orange Parade down the Garvaghy Road. His attack on the partiality of the British Government's approach had been deliberately made on the BBC for maximum effect. In particular, he had focused on the profound wrong of a State yielding to force or its threat.
 - Turning again to the 10 August parade in Derry, the **Taoiseach** suggested that it might be useful if the Bogside Resident Groups repeated their offer of a meeting with the Apprentice Boys. The SDLP are trying to reach a compromise with the Apprentice Boys through a direct dialogue, the Resident Groups might usefully input into that and it would obviously be helpful if the two sets of views synchronised. The delegation indicated agreement. **Ó Murchú** said however that he anticipates, or rather does not rule out, 'an RUC purge against Bogside youths' close to 10 August in order to facilitate a trouble free Apprentice Boys march on the Bogside Walls. Such a move would inflame an already incensed community and it is thus imperative that the issue be resolved very soon.
 - The meeting concluded with an assurance from the **Taoiseach** that everything the Government can do will be done and the process of dealing with the issues raised in a substantive rather than purely emotive way would commence with the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference meeting on the following day. The Resident Groups thanked him for the Government's efforts and for his agreement to meet them at such short notice.

Henry Collins
18 July 1996