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12 Parades '56

(Derry)
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Confidential

Meeting with the Representatives of Portadown and Belfast Resident Groups

Belfast, 26 July 1996

Second Secretary O hUiginn, accompanied by the undersigned, met a delegation of representatives of the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community (LOCC) and the Garvaghy Residents Coalition at the LOCC headquarters on the Lower Ormeau Road. The primary spokespersons in the group of seven, were Michael Goodman of the LOCC (and a full time member of LORAG, the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group) and Brendan McCionnaith of the Garvaghy Residents Coalition. The following points of interest arose;

- O hUiginn welcomed the opportunity to meet the representatives for an exchange of views on what had transpired at Drumcree and elsewhere and the prospects for the Apprentice Boys parades on 10 August.
- The residents relayed, with feeling but without rancour, their sense of the implications of what had transpired recently - the shattering of any confidence in the RUC as an impartial force, the belief that the loyal orders were inspired by sectarian hatred in their insistence on marching through nationalist areas, the lack of faith in the *bona fides* of the loyal orders as evidenced in their unwillingness to meet local residents, and the overriding need for parades to proceed solely on the basis of consent (as set out in the LOCC's six principles and adopted by the combined Bogside, LOCC and Garvaghy groups).
- As evidenced by their comments, the impact of recent events was two-fold; it reinforced their adherence to the principle of local consent as an absolute precondition of parades and it compelled them to set the parades issue on "six county" level i.e. that the issue could not be solved on a local level but must be addressed as a whole. Hence the combination of the three groups and the linking of the Derry Apprentice route with that of the Garvaghy Road and the Lower Ormeau.

- O hUiginn said that the Government fully understood their concerns. He outlined the Government's perspective on recent events and their serious impact, not least on the current talks. The issues involved - the failure to uphold the rule of law, the collapse in nationalist confidence in the RUC, the nature of the changed decision on the Drumcree parade route, the aggressive tactics of the RUC, the use of plastic bullets - were the subject of ongoing exchanges with the British Government. These matters would be fully pursued. A start had been made at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference at which the Tánaiste had, in no uncertain terms, laid out our concerns and those of the nationalist community, North and South.

- As for the independent review, O hUiginn said that while one could be sceptical about its efficacy, particularly since its recommendations would be made outside the life of the current British Government, it nevertheless was best for the Irish Government to have the strongest possible input to it and he canvassed their views in this regard.

- He commended the agreement reached between the LOCC and the Ballynafeigh Lodge last year as a model of its kind and that it was regrettable that it, along with the Garvaghy Road agreement, had been sabotaged by the triumphalism of Trimble and Paisley. As to the role of the unionist leadership at Drumcree this year, the activities of the Orange order and the lawlessness of the loyalists, O hUiginn said that he believed these had done considerable damage to the cause of unionism in Britain, even in conservative political and media circles. There was a deep tendency within Britain to view the parades issue as just another example of two factions hopelessly at odds and in the face of which Britain could do little. A nationalist response which simply replicated the activities of the loyal orders would merely serve to confirm Britain in this self-serving resignation. The opportunity remained for the nationalist community to remain on the higher ground, for example on the forthcoming Apprentice Boys parade in Derry.

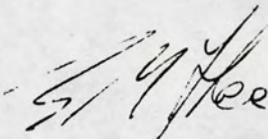
- By way of response, Goodman in particular espoused a particularly stark political interpretation of events which was clearly heavily influenced by republican thinking with references to the sectarianism of the loyal orders, the RUC, the perfidiousness of the

British Government and the isolation and repression of the nationalist community. The nationalist community, he said, would no longer accept second class status and would assert itself on the parades issue through peaceful protests. There was no alternative evident. He said that nationalists were not organising parades in this manner; the issue was forced on them by the loyal orders who wanted to march 18 times a year on the Lower Ormeau, for example. He reiterated that there was no objection to marching and parades in general. But in the small number of cases in which parades were contentious, local consent must be established as the overriding principle. If there was an alternative to resolving the issue, the nationalist community would consider it.

Though gently phrased, McCionnaith said that the loyal orders would come to discuss the issue of parades on a "six county" basis only when forced to do so. He indicated that the nationalist community was prepared, in the wake of Drumcree, to block loyalist parades throughout the North, if that was what required to force the loyal orders to begin negotiations with the resident groups on the broader issue. McCionnaith said that Trimble very deliberately used Drumcree as a political act to strengthen his hand at the talks and with the British. [McCionnaith and the others present indicated, by demeanour as much as by anything else, that thinking on a coordinated nationalist confrontation across Northern Ireland on the parades issue was advanced; in addition to the suggestions that nationalists may block the Craigavon Bridge into Derry, there are indications that moves are also underway, for example, to have people from West Belfast assembled on the Lower Ormeau to block the Apprentice Boys parading there on the morning of 10 August.]

McKee said that the tactics suggested by McCionnaith merely mirrored that of the loyalists and set the debate on their terms. It made the parades issue one of territory and sectarian control rather than principle which, if pushed to its logical conclusion, suggested a segregation of the two communities into ideological and territorial enclaves. He agreed that the parades issue was used politically by the unionist leadership and said that, on that basis, the residents should cast the debate on the political level to maintain the high ground and set about establishing the necessary guiding principles.

O hUiginn pointed to the need to reach an agreement on the Derry parade. One of the problems of dealing with the loyal orders was that, like many such social organisations, central authority was weak. The election on a temporary basis of officers at local level meant that those officers were often very jealous of their prerogatives and would resist direction from above. This obviously made it difficult to reach agreement on wider issues e.g. in the linking of the Derry parade to the other areas such as the Lower Ormeau and Garvaghy Road. The notion of 'consent' as a governing principle was problematic for the loyal orders in that they feared that it might be used in an endless number of areas and routes. The principle may need refining to defuse these fears. He encouraged the group to consider the implications of the Derry parade and the damaging prospect of nationalists providing *post hoc* justification for the antics of the unionist leadership at Drumcree. Derry was a 'Mecca' for the Apprentice Boys and as such was not comparable to other contentious parade routes. It played a central, even formative, part of unionist heritage and its handling by nationalists, therefore, required sensitivity. Arrangements in Derry could be a shinning example for the other areas. If something satisfactory could be worked out in Derry, even if not a binding precedent for other areas, it would nevertheless be of great value in offsetting the trend towards sectarian confrontation. He appealed to the Ormeau and Garvaghy residents to give such arrangements a fair wind from their associations, in the wider interest.



Eamonn McKee

Security Section

30 July 1996

cc. Sec. Sec.
Councillor A1.
PSS/PST.
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