



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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## Visit of Tony Blair M.P.

12/13 December 1996

### Parades

#### Background Note

#### General

1. The damage which has been done to community relations in the wake of events at Drumcree has not lessened with the passage of time and it continues to have reverberations in Northern Ireland. The renewed and violent picket at Harryville in North Antrim, arson attacks on schools in North and South Belfast, sporadic attacks on Protestant churches, private dwellings and businesses, the economic boycotts and ongoing sectarian tensions indicate that the ground remains fertile for another season of tension and disturbance.

#### Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conferences

2. Following the events surrounding Drumcree a special meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was held on 18 July 1996 at the request of the Irish side. In a joint statement following the Conference both Governments recognised the need to rebuild confidence. The Irish side expressed the profound concern of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland and throughout Ireland and elsewhere regarding these events and their consequences for the rule of law.
3. The parades issue was discussed at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference on 20 November 1996. The RUC Chief Constable said that he would not wait until 1997 to develop contacts on the ground on the issue. The Tánaiste raised the need for every precaution to be taken that the burning in Lundy (14 December next) pass off peacefully, particularly in the light of the efforts made by John Hume to ease the tensions in the city generated by recent parades.

#### Community Relations

4. In the aftermath of Drumcree there has been a serious deterioration in community relations. While sectarian attacks on Orange Halls, Catholic schools, churches and private dwellings have taken place regularly over the last two years the situation has worsened recently. A considerable number of Catholic families sought rehousing following Drumcree. There have been numerous attacks on Protestant, Catholic and also mixed marriage homes. In some of the more notorious incidents football supporters have been viciously attacked by loyalists at Portadown and children returning from Orange Order functions have been stoned in North Belfast. Most recently a Catholic Church in Greenisland was seriously damaged by fire. The situation in North Belfast has required the installation of a further stretch of 'peace line' following increasing violence.
5. The economic boycotts of the businesses of Protestants involved in Drumcree-related protests are continuing, though estimates of their extent and impact remain vague.

#### Dunloy

6. For the past three months loyalist pickets have been placed on the Catholic church in

Harryville, Ballymena. Loyalist paramilitary involvement in church protests and street violence has been alleged, including most recently by Rev. Ian Paisley. Talks have taken place between the SDLP and DUP on the matter without resolution. The protesters have linked their actions to the blocking of loyalist parades in nearby Dunloy. The DUP Justice spokesman, Ian Paisley Jnr., who was initially supportive of the protests, has said in recent weeks that they had now become counter-productive. The protests have been widely criticised by church and political leaders, among them David Ervine of the PUP.

7. There has been considerable loyalist pressure recently to allow an Orange parade to proceed through Dunloy. An application was lodged to hold such a parade in the village on 24 November. An application was lodged by the Dunloy Parents and Residents Association to hold a counter-demonstration. There had been little or no contact between the residents group and the unionist side in the run up to the parade. DUP Councillor David McAllister had been in contact with the DPRA 10 days before the parade but no progress was made. In the event, the RUC initially attempted to hold back nationalist protesters amid scuffles but ultimately decided to prevent the march going through the village. There was a short stand-off between the Orange marchers and the RUC. Ian Paisley Jnr., who was in attendance, said that the decision to prevent the march would have "dire consequences". The RUC Chief Constable met with representatives of Dunloy Orangemen on 29 November to discuss the refusal to permit the parade on 24 November. Speaking at the DUP annual conference last weekend, Dunloy Orange Lodge member, John Finlay, said that if the RUC was not prepared to let such marches go ahead, the Orange Order would have to walk through without them. A spokesman for the Dunloy residents group has reiterated a call for talks with the local Orange Order.
8. Up to 300 loyalist protesters demonstrated outside the Harryville church on 30 November. Churchgoers were pelted with missiles and some were dragged from their cars by protesters. A bus was burned on the Larne Road. There were a number of injuries. Riot-clad RUC officers were also attacked. Petrol bombs were thrown during the incident which involved a number of known loyalist paramilitaries. The Rev. Ian Paisley has condemned the protests
9. We have known to the British side of the Secretariat our concerns with regard to the possibility of renewed church protests in Harryville (and possibly in Bushmills and Dervock). The latter responded to the effect that they have raised the matter with the RUC in turn. The RUC were reportedly fully aware of the possibility of protests and offered assurances that "adequate measures" would be taken to ensure that parishioners can get to and from religious services. Following the 30 November disturbances the British side said one arrest had been made and others would follow. The RUC expect further disturbances and will meet the actions of protesters "robustly".
10. On 7 December there were further protests outside Harryville Church. A sizeable RUC presence prevented serious disorder. However, four men were charged under the Public Order Order, one of whom was also charged with assaulting an RUC officer. The UUP mayor of Ballymena, James Currie, was in attendance in solidarity with churchgoers, as were a number of other unionists and Protestant churchmen.

### **Derry - Apprentice Boys Parade, 19 October**

11. Following the parade of 10 August last, when a ban was imposed by the Secretary of State preventing the Apprentice Boys from marching on the walls of Derry, the Apprentice Boys stated their intention to walk the walls "at a time of their own choosing". An application was subsequently made to march on the walls on 19 October. The Bogside Residents Group (BRG) reiterated its request for a meeting with the Apprentice Boys which was refused. Prior to the parade, SDLP leader John Hume M.P. said that the parade should be allowed proceed and that there should be no confrontations. The parade passed off without serious incident though the BRG did, however, hold a token protest and some 300 supporters gathered in support. Tensions between the BRG and the Apprentice Boys were very evident and resulted in sectarian taunts and some bottles being thrown. Alastair Simpson, Governor of the Apprentice Boys, said that talks with the Bogside Residents Group about next year's marches were unlikely.

### **Derry - Burning of Lundy, 14 December**

12. The Apprentice Boys "Burning of Lundy" ceremony is a potential flashpoint. There is a large gap between the two main ceremonies of the day during which time there may be scope for disturbances.

### **Belfast**

13. In recent weeks a loyalist organisation calling itself Ormeau Residents Demand Equal Rights (ORDER) have made two applications to hold marches down the length of the Lower Ormeau Road. An organiser associated with ORDER is reputed to have links with loyalist paramilitaries. The first parade on 27 October was stopped by the RUC at the Ormeau Bridge. Around 100 demonstrators protested, the turnout being far more modest than that expected by Gilmore. Apprentice Boys Governor Alasdair Simpson and Rev. William Hoey attended. Gilmore described the application for a parade on 17 November as part of a religious wreath-laying service for Protestants who "want to express our religious and civil rights". In the event, Gilmore was unable to attend and the march fizzled out.

### **Review of Parades**

14. In a statement to the House of Commons on 15 July in the aftermath of Drumcree the Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, announced an independent review of parades. On 24 July he announced the terms of reference for the review in response to a written Parliamentary Question.
15. The terms of reference of the review are as follows:
  - . To review in light of evidence received from any interested party and having regard to the particular experience of 1996, the current arrangements for handling public processions and open-air public meetings and associated public order issues in Northern Ireland, including:
  - . The adequacy of the current legal provisions, and in particular the adequacy of the statutory criteria used in making decisions on public processions and open-air public meeting

- . The powers and responsibilities of the Secretary of State, police and others
- . The possible need for new machinery, both formal and informal to play a part in determining whether and how certain public processions and open-air public meetings should take place
- . The possible role for, and composition of Codes of practice for organisers of an participants in public processions and open-air public meetings

and to make recommendations by the end of January 1997.

16. The review is being chaired by Dr. Peter North, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. Fr. Oliver Crilly, from Strabane, and Rev. John Dunlop are the other members. The Secretary of State has requested that the report be forthcoming by the end of January 1997. At a press conference on 28 August Dr. North announced that letters inviting submissions had been sent to a wide range of interested parties. The members are currently meeting with individuals and organisations to gather views, a process they say will continue into December.

#### **Government Submission**

17. A submission to the Review was made on behalf of the Irish Government last month. The proposals are predicated on the need to reconcile the rights of local communities and of the rights of those who wish to celebrate their heritage by marching. It states that it is beyond the competence of the RUC (or indeed of any police force) to make the political decisions required on contentious parades. The current Public Order legislation is seriously flawed in that those who threaten the greatest disorder prevail.
18. The Government proposes the following;
- The establishment of an Independent Parades Authority operating according to a clear set of directive principles.
  - Parade applications should be submitted by the 31st of January annually. A bond may be required in certain circumstances from the applicant.
  - The Authority would facilitate dialogue, mediation and conciliation between local communities and parade organisers throughout the year. Where there is an absence of agreement the Authority will provide arbitration, the rulings of which would have the force of law.
  - Observers would also be appointed by the Authority to attend contentious parades and to report back on the extent to which the conditions set by the Authority were adhered to. As with any court ruling, the RUC would be required to take the necessary follow up action.
  - The Authority would report to the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding the British Army on any matters of concern regarding security

force conduct. Annual reports would be produced by the Authority.

- A decision to ban a parade would remain the responsibility of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State would also maintain a consultative role at all levels.

19. Officials of the Anglo-Irish Division met with the Review members in Belfast on 12 November to discuss the Government's submission.

#### **British Government**

20. At the IGC on 20 November, the Secretary of State said that he had met with the Independent Review in mid-November. In his meeting with the Review he asked them to pay particular regard to the events of the summer; (this is, in any case, within the terms of reference of the review). The Secretary of State also said that the end of January deadline was in order to allow him sufficient time to make such changes as he considered advisable in light of the Review recommendations. He added that "legislative changes were not ruled out".

#### **British Labour Party Position**

21. The British Labour Party has argued in the past that some form of commission or tribunal might play a positive role in resolving the parades issue, though it did not seek to define precisely its terms. It did not push the issue with great force, in line the prevailing desire to maintain a bipartisan policy on Northern Ireland. The Labour party prepared a submission to the North Commission and met with its members. It appears that Labour was intent on striking a balance between the right to march and the responsibilities of those wishing to exercise those rights. Labour's current thinking on the issue is very much in line with the "planning permission" approach which seeks to manage the process of approving marches, controlling the overall number of marches and setting out a code of practice.

Security Section  
Anglo-Irish Division  
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