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15 July 1996

~~To: HQ  
For: C. O. Floinn~~

No of pages including this one: 4

From: Belfast  
From: B. Nolan**Subject: Ormeau Road Orange parade, 12 July 1996**

1. You will be aware from media reports that the Orange Parade was allowed through the Lower Ormeau Road on 12 July 1996. The entire area was sealed off from 6pm the previous evening, in an operation designed:
  - a) to ensure that the Parade would go through with minimum disruption
  - b) to prevent any repetition of last year's incidents on the Bridge.

Taking both of these objectives into account, the operation was, from a policing point of view, a great success. From every other point of view it was an absolute disaster.

**Curfew**

2. Due probably to a fortuitous, as well as a fortunate, combination of men and motives present for the occasion, there was little or no trouble at any stage before or after the Parade. Nothing (much) more than an insult was thrown at the police. In the face of such hopeless odds, the residents of the Lower Ormeau were, for once, totally united in the view that passive forms of resistance only made any sense and offered any hope of avoiding a further plunge into the abyss.
3. The LOCC and LORAG personnel were joined by the two local clergy, Fr McCann, PP, and Fr Curran, SDLP representatives, and 'mediation personalities', such as Brendan McAllister and the Quilleys, in a combined "peace-keeping operation", which appears to have received very little help or encouragement from the police. It

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was quite clear from the start, i.e., 6pm or thereabouts on Thursday evening, what the police intention was regarding the Orange Parade due to arrive at Ormeau Bridge about 15 hours later. There was no doubt (and there could be no doubt) in the minds of all observers present that the Parade would go through Lower Ormeau no matter what last minute efforts might be made to strike a deal of some kind. Yet the information being made available officially to us was that the police authority would not make up its mind about the Parade until possibly the last minute on the morning of the Twelfth.

#### Failure to inform Secretariat

4. I have already reported the sequence of events involving the Joint Secretariat. Following the failure to inform us beforehand on the Drumcree decision, the Joint Secretary sought to re-establish the normal rule for the Lower Ormeau. As a result of this we were assured repeatedly (because we asked repeatedly) that we would be informed of the police decision on the Lower Ormeau as soon as the NIO received same. In the event, it became another Drumcree. We were given no information whatever beforehand. I telephoned the NIO at 9am and again at 9.30am on the morning of the Twelfth to be told by the duty officer, Jonathan Margetts, that he remained "in the dark" about the whole affair. I received the news that the Parade had already passed through the Lower Ormeau from a journalist contact at 9.35am.
5. Subsequently, as instructed, I protested sharply to the NIO about this (second) failure to keep us informed, all the more deplorable given the NIO's own undertaking to do so. I also drew the NIO's attention to the very damaging consequences the police decisions and actions would have for progress on the parades issue in the Lower Ormeau and for relations with the police at such a difficult time. Finally, I told the NIO (in accordance with instructions) that it should be prepared for a substantial further protest at political level without delay.

#### Return parade

6. The security screen around the Lower Ormeau was scaled down after the Parade passed through, but in such a way as to hold the Bridge for the return Parade, expected about 7pm on the evening of the Twelfth. Thus the overall policing operation was held in place for a further 10-12 hours, making confrontation with the police inevitable when darkness fell and the Orange Bands had returned home to



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Ballynafeigh. In the event, the worst incidents on the evening of the Twelfth occurred, not in the Lower Ormeau, but further down the road at the Markets and in nearby Short Strand.

Questions to be raised

7. While the entire context of the debate on parades and policing has been transformed by the events of the past five days, the handling of this year's relatively trouble-free Twelfth Parade in the Lower Ormeau will need to be addressed no less urgently than last year's. Three aspects in particular will need to be looked at.
- Firstly, the failure to keep us informed (paras 4 to 5 above).
  - Secondly, we must ask what the justification was for a martial-law type of operation in the Lower Ormeau beginning 15 hours before the Orange Parade and ending 12 hours after it had passed down the road. If (as we were repeatedly told) the police had not yet made a final decision on the Parade, what hope was there for last minute mediation efforts in such dire and threatening circumstances? It would be impossible to convey the sense of helplessness and hopelessness which prevailed on the Lower Ormeau as darkness fell on Thursday evening. In scenes reminiscent of the steerage deck of the sinking Titanic, a huddled mass of local residents gathered round their priests and prayed the rosary, watched over by a phalanx of robocop clad police and scores of journalists.
  - Thirdly, there is the matter of the return route. Some of the damage inflicted on the Lower Ormeau community might have been repaired a little if the police had taken the decision to send the marchers back home along the Ormeau Embankment. A glance at the map shows that the Ballynafeigh Brethren would not have been inconvenienced by this. The Quilleys (Quakers) believe the Orangemen would, in all likelihood, have raised only a mild objection to a decision to re-route the homeward Parade in this way. It might have helped in a small but significant way to show the residents that their feelings were not totally discounted by the police, thus leaving the way open for some kind of dialogue on future marches in the days ahead.

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**Bishop Dallatt's visit to St Malachy's**

8. I visited St Malachy's briefly last evening and found Fr McCann and his parish clerk still quite shocked and trying to come to terms with what has happened in the past 4/5 days. Fr McCann has served 13 years in the Lower Ormeau parish and 10 years before that in the Short Strand. He is an elderly, very old-fashioned parish priest. He told me that the trauma of the past week is more deeply felt in that battered community than anything else that has happened during the Troubles.

They felt that with Dublin and Maryfield there "to look after them", nothing like this could ever happen again. But it has happened and he is deeply fearful of the effects it will have on young people and on relations with the police. Bishop Michael Dallatt came to St Malachy's yesterday morning to offer what comfort he could. In a strongly worded and pointed sermon, he questioned the legality of "the curfew" imposed on the Lower Ormeau and spoke about the sense of betrayal which will take years to heal.