



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting with Dunloy Residents and Parents Association

Dunloy, 20 August 1996

I met with five members of the Dunloy Residents and Parents Association to discuss the parades issue. The main speakers were Patrick O’Kane, Patsy Scott and Tony Sheppard. The following points of interest arose;

- Dunloy is all but 100% nationalist, a small village of some 1,500 individuals in the unionist heartland of Ballymena/Ballymoney. It has a vibrant and successful hurling club which appears to inform the male residents with a determined, not to say martial, spirit and a faith in their physical prowess to defend the village against loyalist incursions as the need arises. When on the evening of 10 August last large numbers of drunken Apprentice Boys (i.e. over 30 buses and as many cars) converged from Derry on the village to try and force a march through, the village were prepared to fight; they had blocked the three main access points with felled trees and burning skips, piled reserves of hurling sticks and petrol bombs and drafted in reinforcements from the hinterland.
- The group of residents did not show any great concern for the wider issue of parades nor for the other contentious areas such as the Lower Ormeau, Garvaghy Road and Derry. They have avoided any involvement from Sinn Féin or the SDLP in their association to ensure that it remains a community group. They were not particularly concerned with “consent” as a term and did not put the parades issues into a wider political context. Their concern was with their village and their desire to stop loyal order parades occurring there without prior agreement. The residents of Dunloy, are therefore, a cohesive community group distaining politics whose concerns are parochial and whose instincts are to rely on their own resources rather than on the wider nationalist community. What would in any other situation be local rivalries fought out on the football pitch are, in the Northern context, deepened and embittered by the sectarian divide.
- Their objection to parades seems to arise from a number of factors. The primary issue is bad community relations; the inexorable fact is that the parades are seen as sectarian coat-trailing by the residents. The demeanor of the marchers, the muttered sectarian insults and offensive hand gestures confirm the residents in this belief. They also believe that the Orange Order in particular uses parades to generate inter-community friction; the residents claimed that Orange parades are organised to coincide with events in the village such as the return of the hurling team from championship matches or with the annual ‘cemetery Sunday’ (the date of which varies year to year and yet still ‘coincides’ with an Orange event) when graves are visited.
- A secondary factor is the RUC presence which imposes a prolonged curfew on the village during the many parades which had occurred there up until this year; so far this season there have only been two parades, one which was forced through under a very heavy RUC guard and another to which the residents agreed because they were permitted to mount a silent protest. Not surprisingly, relations between the residents and the local RUC officers are poor.

- The residents believe that the village has a right to demand that parades, causing such distress and disruption and apparently designed for sectarian purposes, should be banned. That said, they agreed, albeit with the reservation that some of the harder heads in the village would dissent, that some parades were genuinely traditional and ought to be allowed. They cited the annual harvest Church parade organised by the Orange Order each September in this regard.
- As regards contact with the Royal Black Perceptory regarding their proposed march on 31 August, they are in contact with David Tweed (the Irish international rugby player who is a member of all three loyal orders) in a private capacity and hope that he can act as an interlocutor.
- They asked whether the Government felt that they should agree to a number of parades (2 or 3 was suggested) each year. I replied by restating the Government's official position on parades and that the best outcome is clearly a local agreement which both sides deem to be a fair compromise. It was a question of finding an acceptable way of living together. They agreed that the current confrontations were very stressful and that an agreement reached through dialogue and mutual respect was the goal. They nonetheless remained concerned that many in the community were simply set against any parades and that lines had been drawn. Much confidence building and mutual trust had to be developed. Without direct dialogue with the loyal orders, an essential prerequisite for mutual respect, they did not think that the village would accept parades.
- In this regard, Michael Goodman of the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community subsequently informed me that the Dunloy group will meet on Saturday (24 August) with other resident groups under the aegis of the LOCC. The purpose of the meeting is to counsel the villages to act in a restrained and generous manner for the remainder of the marching season. The LOCC leadership (perhaps inspired by another tier of leadership?) is concerned that the village resident groups are adding to the impression of being simply the mirror image of the loyal orders in attempting to block all parades. Goodman felt that the resident groups had lost some sympathy within the nationalist community (north and south) because of this.

Eamonn McKee
Security Section
22 August 1996