

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Parades - Overview of Flashpoints, 30 June 1997

General

1. Hope, dread and fatalism are common elements in conversations with those observing or involved in the parades issue. There is a hope that the Garvaghy Road can be resolved peacefully and that that will defuse the production line of staged parade conflicts from 6 July to the climax on the Twelfth. This hope is not based on any clear notion of a Garvaghy compromise or how, if one was agreed, the other planned parades can be switched off and those intent on conflict be persuaded to desist. There is a widespread dread that the summer will be worse than last year, that local lodges (with swollen membership since Drumcree 1996) are more hardline and intent on confrontation in their respective areas, that the republican movement is determined to be displeased and ready for battle. Drumcree is the trigger for the reaction of both sides and how it falls will set off a domino effect in both communities. In any event, the parades filed in support of the Portadown lodge and the main parades on 12 July, particularly those in Derry and the Lower Ormeau Road but also in innumerable other locations, represent potential bush fires of civil disturbances. In the face of this, there is a pervasive sense of fatalism amongst those genuinely wishing to avoid conflict which has meant that mediators have resiled from involvement and community leaders have apparently lost the will to try.

2. Orangemen will be taking their annual holidays from 10th to 27th of July, leaving them free to demonstrate and parade at will during this time. ("That's what they do for their holidays" as Jim Hassen of Bellaghy told me with resignation and not a little sadness that the nationalist nightmare of July is the holiday of the loyal orders.) The following is a review of the situation in the main flashpoints.

Garvaghy Road

3. If the authorities pull off some manoeuvre whereby the Orange Order parades along the Garvaghy without direct conflict with the residents, there may be subsequent disturbances if the nationalists residents have not acquiesced and are humiliated. If the authorities hold the line, local lodges across Northern Ireland will come out in support. While they

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may avoid direct confrontation with the security forces at roads and ports, they may mount a series of stand-offs which bring Northern Ireland to a virtual stop.

4. MacCionnaith believes that yet again the residents are "the soft option". On the other hand, the sheer scale of the security presence and the likelihood of tight media control in the immediate Portadown area may have a dampening effect there. Because of its isolation from other nationalist areas and its situation in the heartland of violent loyalism, the Garvaghy Road community depends on the security forces for protection from incursions from loyalist mobs (the experience of Obins Street in 1985-86, under siege from loyalists and saved only by the deployment of the British Army, has not been forgotten locally; the RUC apparently threw a protective cordon around the area on the evening of the murders of Constables Johnston and Graham in Lurgan). It is precisely this vulnerability which, if and when it is exploited, enrages other nationalists as happened last year.

5. It is believed that some 200 to 300 loyalist paramilitaries were involved in the Drumcree standoff, led by Billy Wright and his henchmen (believed responsible for the murder of Michael McGoldrick last year). Many of these have formed the Loyalist Volunteer Force and even without Wright's presence (he is currently serving 7 years for intimidation) must be a major factor in the calculations of the authorities. The leader of the Portadown Lodge, Harold Gracie, has privately invoked fear of them to justify his demand to walk the Garvaghy at all costs. Local RUC officers could not be considered reliable and impartial enforcers of the law, either through fear of retribution, sympathy for or membership of a loyal order, or in some cases association with a loyalist paramilitary organisation.

Derry

6. Derry has been chosen as the location for the main County Derry Orange Parade on 12 July. The Order have claimed that this has arisen in its natural turn according to the dictating arcana. There is a suspicion however, that Derry has been selected out of turn for tactical reasons - if the Orange get through the Garvaghy, they will undoubtedly be

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stopped in Derry by nationalists, thus allowing the Order to preserve the notion of grievance equally balanced. The Order has also filed for parades on every day between 6 July and 12 July to convey relentless support for any standoff and generate loyalist outrage if and when each parade is banned or rerouted.

7. The Bogside Residents Group and the republican community of the Bogside generally are preparing for major confrontation. One of their leaders said that they had their "hospitals" ready (private houses organised with first aid available for injured rioters). His message was that if it goes wrong on the Garvaghy, Derry will explode again as it did last year. The proposed Orange parade on 12 July has a repetitive and circuitous route that takes Orange men into and around the Diamond on a number of occasions. If it proceeds, this will mean a massive security operation. Given the very sour relations between the Bogside and the RUC (the Bogside remains a virtual no go area to the security forces), this may well entail confrontations between the security forces and nationalists. Last year, in the wake of the disturbances which engulfed Derry after Drumcree, the RUC virtually ran amok, firing plastic bullets in their thousands even at those innocently leaving bars (for example from the walls along Shipquay street and in one instance within an inch of the back of the head of a CAJ observer). Many of these plastic bullets now appear to have been dangerously defective.

8. There are also some indications that the republican leadership may have an interest in serious disturbances over marches; a bad summer would help indict the unionist leadership and undermine the credibility of any talks process embracing the unionists but excluding Sinn Féin. They are well placed to do this in Derry by sheer dint of numbers and the ease of cutting off the city at the bridges. They also have a very experienced cadre of local leaders capable of restraining (to a point) or unleashing those inspired for conflict with either the loyal orders or the security forces.

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Lower Ormeau Road

9. Contacts between the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community (LOCC) and the local Ballynafeigh Orange Lodge have now diminished to the point of extinction. The LOCC believe that the lodge has effectively been taken over by the Spirit of Drumcree group and Pauline Gilmore (a hardliner with links to loyalist paramilitaries in east Belfast who opposes any form of dialogue. She was present at the Apprentice Boys attempt to march through Dunloy which ended in clashes with the RUC. Indeed her extremism has apparently led to tensions with the UDP for whom she contested a local government seat recently). One of the leading Ballynafeigh Orangemen who had been involved in dialogue, Noel Liggett, has now 'gone hard' according to observers. The potential for dialogue is now non-existent and the potential for violent clashes palpable.

10. As a positive gesture, the LOCC said they had refrained from postering the area with 'No Sectarian Marches' slogans but in the absence of talks and in the expectation of a heavy media presence, will now dust off the posters. The LOCC will mount counter demonstrations in the face of the applications by Ballynafeigh to march the Lower Ormeau from 6 to 12 July. The RUC curfew imposed on the area to allow the Orange march there on 12 July 1996 led to widespread criticism. RUC Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, has privately condemned that curfew and indicated that it will not be repeated. However, he faces an unenviable decision; stopping the Twelfth march would threaten to draw in loyalists from all over the greater Belfast area for the stand-off. Forcing a parade along the Lower Ormeau would entail a massive security operation and inevitable conflict with the residents. Flanagan's easiest option may be to force the parade down as early as possible in the morning (this would appeal to hardline members of the loyal orders who believe their opponents - in their view feckless and unemployed Catholics - are not early risers like their righteous Protestant neighbours).

11. As a complicating factor, rumours have circulated that republicans from West Belfast will move into the Lower Ormeau in support; a potentially dangerous factor may be clashes between loyalist and republican paramilitaries who reportedly shadowed each other during previous parade confrontations. Local loyalist paramilitaries have an unfulfilled

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vendetta against the republicans for the Bratty/Elder killings (themselves the result of the Sean Graham Bookies massacre in 1992 which gave rise to local opposition to loyalist marches along the road.)

North Belfast

12. North Belfast is undoubtedly the most volatile area in Northern Ireland. It is a patchwork of hardline enclaves - Republican Ardoyne cheek by jowl with loyalist Tiger's Bay, for example, Duncairn Gardens being the most dangerous fault line between them. There is a pervasive sense of menace and suppressed violence in their respective clubs and bars. It is complicated by internal rivalries between UVF and UDA paramilitaries competing for territories and protection rackets, most recently along Limestone Road. The local IRA warlord, Eddie Copeland, was last year injured in a loyalist car bomb attack which did nothing to convert him to pacifism. (He was immediately and wrongly suspected by loyalists as responsible for the murder of 'Basher' Bates) He is reputed to be openly associating with the INLA in the area. At the height of the disturbances last July, shots were fired at the RUC, injuring one officer. It was rumoured that the INLA had been contracted by the IRA for the job; this may simply indicate a degree of fluidity between the groups there. Either way, republican paramilitaries are poised to act in the propitious circumstances of serious disturbances.

13. The local RUC is ill-equipped or motivated to control the situation there. Provocative loyalist marches - known as the 'Tour of the North' - combined with the outcome of the Garvaghy Road issue could well spark off another round of rioting, intimidation, house burnings and images of families fleeing with armfuls of children and possessions. Fatalities would not be unlikely in such circumstances. Particularly dangerous areas include Duncairn Gardens and Mountcollyer Street/Limestone Road (the scene of intimidation earlier this year).

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West Belfast

14. Strong republican control. a light security presence and the absence of sectarian rivalry means that West Belfast does not succumb to disturbances unless it actually wants to or unless loyal orders deliberately provoke trouble along its margins. for example on the Springfield Road. If trouble does erupt here it will most likely be because the republican movement wants it to happen.

Dunloy

15. Dunloy is a completely nationalist village and its opposition to parades there without their agreement led local hardliners to mount the Harryville protests. The Dunloy Residents and Parents Association - which was devoid of any overt or covert Sinn Féin presence - effectively dissolved when its attempt at mediation was sabotaged earlier this year by the Spirit of Drumcree and the DUP (a delegation met the then Tánaiste at the time to brief him on the process, see report of 1 May 1997). It has kept a very low profile ever since, a combination of despair and fear that some villager will be killed (a la Sean Brown) as revenge for its opposition to marches - despite its agreement to a number of marches as part of the mediation process. (Michael Stone, the loyalist killer currently serving time for his attack on mourners at Milltown Cemetery remarked recently that if things got rough, they would turn Dunloy into a car park.)

16. Last May, the Apprentice Boys filed to hold a service at the Dunloy Orange Hall on the outskirts of the village (supported by trouble makers from far afield). It appeared to the assembled villagers that the RUC had blocked off the road to the Hall with the intention of allowing the Apprentice Boys to march to the Hall, contrary to agreement arrived at with the villagers. One hundred or so villagers cut across the fields to outflank the RUC and some confrontation erupted when the two sides met. The RUC decided then to block the Apprentice Boys from going, in what ever formation, to the Hall. About 100 (out of a total of 200) Apprentice Boys refused to disperse after Rev. Paisley had left ("to fight another day") and violence erupted as darkness fell. As a result of what was seen as perfidy on the RUC's part, the villagers have broken all contact with the RUC.

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17. One member of the loyalist Dunloy Band involved in the Harryville protests and seeking to march through Dunloy, has been charged with the murder of RUC Constable Grey Taylor, kicked to death for his part in preventing an Apprentice Boys parade through the village last April.

18. The local Dunloy Orange lodge has filed for marches on 11 and 12 July. The villagers are confused. The more moderate elements want to restrain the younger elements but fear being identified as community leaders. Yet their genuine and courageous attempts at moderation ended in defeat at the hands of the Dunloy Orange Lodge (which was taken over by the DUP). Ultimately, the villagers will likely stand ready (armed with hurling sticks) to prevent unwelcome marches and protect the village from being over-run. There is much dread that they will again experience the fear and hysteria of being besieged by drunken loyalist marchers as happened on one occasion last year.

Bellaghy

19. The killing of Sean Brown in Bellaghy caused widespread anger in the village and throughout the whole GAA community. It has deepened feelings about the RUC (one of whom is suspected of being involved) and about loyal order marches through the mainly nationalist village. A standoff last July ended in the Orange Order essentially giving up and doing a u-turn. An Orange march there two weeks ago ended in a similar fashion, though this was the agreed outcome beforehand. Managing this involved 500 RUC officers. The presence of the British Army and heavy equipment suggested that the security forces used the event as a dry run for similar operations expected later in other areas. The mini-Twelfth scheduled for 7 July next is causing concern in the village and trouble is expected. Some 3,000 to 4,000 Orangemen are expected to participate. The village want the RUC to ban it altogether from the village - an attempt to u-turn such a large crowd would result in a stand-off and confrontation.

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Newtownbutler

20. The Parades Commission has unadvisedly become involved in mediation between the residents and the Orange Order. The residents are lead by moderates. Michael McPhillips and Fergus McQuillan (a member of the SDLP). Rev. Roy Magee is heading the Parades Commission initiative. It remains to be seen whether his efforts will succeed

Pomeroy

21. Nationalist residents in the Keragh housing estate formed a Residents Association to oppose Orange marches in the village. It is led by Desmond Grimes, believed to be close to Sinn Féin (a local IRA leader, Begley, is also said to be in the background). The Association opposes marches by loyal orders in the village generally, unless there has been direct dialogue and agreement (standard republican theology).

22. The local Orange Order regards the Association as a republican outfit operating to broader republican instruction and which, as a result, craves the recognition of direct dialogue. Most members of the Orange Order have had friends and relatives in the security forces who were killed by the IRA and, combined with their vulnerable situation as a community in Tyrone, apparently find it impossible to consent to dialogue with the Association. They have filed to march to the local Church of Ireland in the village centre and parade around the Diamond. They have agreed not to march in two contentious streets (North and Lucy Streets). The Residents Association wants the Order to engage in dialogue and, if agreed, march directly to Church. Given the Order's sense of vulnerability it will likely march to the village and u-turn, rather than agree to dialogue or court a violent confrontation.

Other Potential Flashpoints

23. Much will obviously depend on what happens on the Garvaghy Road. If the Orange Order is frustrated there, lodges across Northern Ireland will look to parade and demonstrate with trouble occurring, as it did last year, in places like Newry, Armagh and Coalisland. Indeed any nationalist centre of population will be at risk from spontaneous marches and mobilised republican opposition. If Orange feet do march on the Garvaghy

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Road and the Garvaghy residents are humiliated, moderate nationalists will be encouraged to oppose Orange marches in their areas.

24. Irrespective of what happens on the Garvaghy, the combination of sufficient numbers on both sides ready for confrontation, the sense of political uncertainty (or endgame as some believe) and the aroused notions of territory and identity under threat (in Joel Patton's phrase, "there's a war going on in this wee country") form a highly combustible mixture.

Eamonn McKee
Security Section
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