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To: Mr Colm O'Floinn, Anglo-Irish Division
Date: 24 February 1997
Fax Nr.:
Pages: 4, including this cover sheet.
From: Helen Blake
Subject: **North Report - the view from the UIO**

re Parades Review (Election)

COMMENTS:

I attach a copy of a response to the North Report issued by the Unionist Information Office in London which Patricia Campbell faxed to me today. She said that it had issued to the media about two weeks ago. I summarise below the argument put forward in the document by Campbell for what it is worth.

The general point made is that the North Report is 'fundamentally flawed' in that it attempts to equate the rights of Orangemen to march with the right of residents' groups to prevent the marches. It asserts that 'throughout the North Report there is an underlying theme that Sinn Féin refuse to accept the Orange Order's right to exist and by implication the right of the community from which it comes to exist'.

The statement claims that the report completely misrepresent(s) the realities of life in Northern Ireland' where 'the enshrinement of the principle of equality under the law has completely destroyed the myth that Ulster Catholics are a downtrodden minority'. It continues that 'it is a shame that the report has been used to perpetuate this myth'. North fails to acknowledge that the Orange Order does not simply march to commemorate the past but also 'that the world might know that it represents the democratic aspirations of the vast majority of the people of Ulster - Protestant and Catholic'.

The statement deems the establishment of a Parades Commission 'neither feasible nor logical' maintaining that the responsibility for maintaining order is an absolute one and not one that can be delegated from the RUC. It says that the UUP does not believe the Irish Government 'when it hints that it might not use the rights conferred upon it under the Anglo-Irish Agreement' to nominate appointees to the Commission and believes that the exercise of this right would make it 'inherently impossible to find Unionists who would be willing to serve' on the Commission. In any case the two roles of the Commission - mediation and adjudication - undermine each other.

The statement concludes that nevertheless the UUP's 'determination to create consensus by building on all the things that unite us in Northern Ireland remains as strong as ever' and believes that their 'positive vision of an Ulster based on equality, religious tolerance and prosperity for all' means that they 'will do all in our power to bring people together'.

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THE NORTH REPORT: AN ULSTER UNIONIST RESPONSE

No Unionist is against mediation. We have no desire to see last summer's scenes repeated. We too want to ensure that Northern Ireland is a society where ,as the report says, rights for all are safeguarded and everyone acknowledges that with these rights come responsibilities.

However, we believe that several of the premises on which the North Report are based are fundamentally flawed. The report attempts to equate the rights of Orangemen to march with the rights of residents groups to prevent these marches taking place. It calls for mediation to arrive at consensus. In Northern Ireland those who actively support a United Ireland, generally agreed to be no more than 25% of Ulster Catholics, do not agree about the nature of the state. They do not accept the right of the pro Union people of Northern Ireland to exist, never mind the right of a certain section of that population to hold its traditional annual festivities.

When the members of Sinn Fein who front the residents groups say "no Orangemen here " it is a refinement of the traditional IRA cry "Brits out." But the Brits they are referring to are not the soldiers who have come to the Province since 1969, but the descendants of the people who arrived there in 1609. That is why the IRA has been waging genocide on the Protestants of Ulster's border communities for the last 27 years. To make this point is not to indulge in the paranoia which Unionists are sometimes accused of displaying. It is to explain the background against which the events of the most recent summers have taken place.

Throughout the North Report there is an underlying theme that Sinn Fein refuse to accept the Orange Order's right to exist and by implication the right of the community from which it comes to exist .The Report actually claims (para 1.15) that the sound of parades "may be a reminder of a political status from which (the protester) is determined to escape. Parades are said to be "threatening and intimidating" (para 5.32)

Again we are told that for Ulster Catholics the sound of the parades brings to mind their "more recent experience of discrimination at the hands of Unionist administrations" (para 1.27) It is pointed out that "it would be helpful if the Orange Order would address some of the anti Roman Catholic material in its foundation documents" (para 1.32) Parades we are told are "intrinsically sectarian", a "deliberate reminder that Nationalists were still second class citizens"(para 5.30)

This is to completely misrepresent the realities of life in Northern Ireland. People in the rest of the United Kingdom are generally unaware that for the last 20 years the people of Northern Ireland have had a Fair Employment Act. The enshrinement of the principle of equality under the law has completely destroyed the myth that Ulster Catholics are a downtrodden minority. It is a shame that the North Report has been used to perpetuate this myth.

The Fair Employment Act gives a simple message about Northern Ireland to the world. Bigotry will not be tolerated. People expect to be treated fairly, feel outraged when they are not and have been provided with remedies for redressing their grievances The act has helped

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transform the nature of Ulster society. We would have expected the report to display some awareness of the changes brought about in Ulster society over this period.

We are told that the North Committee found "comparative differences in self confidence between the two communities(para 5.5) In para 5.39 reference is again made to the self confident and articulate nature of the spokespersons of residents groups as contrasted with the representatives of the Orange order. Yet we are also asked to believe that these same residents groups are cowed and intimidated by the triumphalist nature of orange marches

Nowhere in the report is it acknowledged that the Orange Order does not simply march to commemorate the past. It marches so that the world might know that it represents the democratic aspirations of the vast majority of the people of Ulster- Protestant and Catholic. The Orange order has long said that it celebrates its Protestant heritage whilst also accepting that preserving the Union is not a sectarian issue. If it is this celebration of its heritage which is unacceptable to the residents groups, then so much for the much vaunted parity of esteem.

The report actually claims "protests can be an expression of assertiveness on the part of the local community, making the point that nationalist residents too wish to play a role in society" (para 5.7) It is claimed that "spokespersons see themselves as part of a more widespread political community which is frustrated in its desire to have some access to political power. Street protests are a way of affecting what happens in the vicinity where they live" (para 5.34)

It is hard to believe that such statements could be made in good faith in a mature political democracy. We in Northern Ireland have a democratic process which allows everyone to play their part in shaping society. This culminates every five years in a general election. The report might as well say that by killing people the IRA is trying to empower those Gerry Adams claims to represent.It might equally say that those who took part in the poll tax riots in Trafalgar Square were only trying to make society work more effectively, facilitating a role in the decision making framework for those traditionally denied access to the paradigm of power and participation. It would make as much sense and would be as equally naive and misguided.

Whatever recommendations the report might have made there is a small minority in Northern Ireland who are always going to seize upon mechanisms provided by the State to attempt to undermine the foundations of the state. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the Report's central recommendation- the establishment of a parades Commission is neither feasible nor logical.

The police currently take decisions relating to marches based on the likely impact on public order. There responsibility for maintaining order is an absolute one and not one which can be delegated. These are political decisions the report says. The RUC should not be making political decisions. So we will give the responsibility to an unaccountable body of non political amateurs.This is the justification for the proposed Parades Commission.

The Ulster Unionist Party does not believe the Irish government when it hints that it might not exercise the rights conferred upon it under the Anglo Irish Agreement to nominate its appointees to the Parades Commission. We believe it is unacceptable that the responsibility for taking critical decisions about the order of our state should be taken by a body several of whose members will speak for another government which has never renounced its claim to our Province. We believe that this would make it inherently impossible to find Unionists who

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would be willing to serve on this commission. There is no way in which the commission could have the credibility in Northern Ireland which would be neccessary if it was to be effective.

In any event the proposed role of the parades Commission contains contradictions. The report consistently states that the RUC should not both make decisions about marches and then have to enforce these decisions. (paras 6.29, 11.8, 12.6 etc) Yet the report suggests that the Commission should mediate in cases of disagreement, but should mediation fail it would be up to the Commission to make a ruling on what should happen.

These two roles conciliation and adjudication are completely inconsistent. They can not be exercised by the same body without the latter role interfering with and undermining the former. We believe that they should be separated and the latter role should remain with the RUC, who are accountable to the secretary of State and with the Secretary of State, who must answer to Parliament for the consequences of his decisions.

The North Report refers to "the very positive contribution individuals acting as mediators can make" (para 10.32); " the need for greater understanding about other's values and perceptions" (para 11.3); the importance of "local accommodation(para 11.4) We welcome these themes and it is through these ideas that we believe there will be hope for the future. The process of education, mediation, of breaking down the barriers of fear and mistrust is especially the responsibility of the Ulster Unionist Party, the largest party of the Union, and the party for all the pro Union people of Northern Ireland.

This is why we are willing to sit down with our fellow democratically elected representatives in Northern Ireland and see how fears and mistrust can be diffused. For example that is why David Trimble has been spending so much time recently talking with SDLP repreentaives such as Brid Rogers in his Upper Bann constituency about the forthcoming summer. As the report acknowledges only 27% of the people of Northern Ireland believe the sopkespersons for residents groups who were so vocal on our television screens last summer to be genuinely representative.(para 7.61)

We are aware of their not so hidden agenda that of setting neighbour against neighbour, manufacturing conflict where none had ever existed, creating civil disturbance and undermining the foundations of the state. It is a shame that the report does not seem to have examined this agenda more critically. However our determination to create consensus by building on all the things that unite us in Northern Ireland remains as strong as ever.

The report talks about the parades issue highlighting "the importance of addressing perceptions as well as realities" (para 1.11) Our positive vision of an Ulster based on equality, religious tolerance and prosperity for all means that we will do all in our power to bring people together. If as the report says we in Northern Ireland have a choice between "chaos and community" we in the Ulster Unionist Party are very clear on who provides the source of the chaos and who truly represents the community.

Patricia Campbell.
Unionist Information Office.

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