

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/51/560
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Confidential

Meeting with the Garvaghy Road Residents Coalition
25 June 1997

I met with the above at the community hall in Churchill Park. The group of around a dozen were in conclave, considering their response to the faxed invitation from the Secretary of State to the proximity talks. Fr. Eamòn Stack, wide-eyed with excitement and anxiety, was taking notes. Breandán MacCionnaith spoke in the measured tones of a truly angry man. The rest of the group, mainly women, were reserved at first but more relaxed as the meeting progressed. The following points arose (the substance of which has already been conveyed in Mr. Dowling's fax of 25 June).

1. They were genuinely upset at the manner in which this invitation arose. The Orange Order had been consulted well beforehand and the format decided before the residents were approached. The believed they were being bounced into a PR exercise. As to its format, they felt very vulnerable about engaging with what they saw as the combined weight of the Orange Order, RUC and NIO.

2. They accepted that the Secretary of State was very personable; indeed this aspect of her grated particularly with MacCionnaith who seemed very uncomfortable with the evident public sympathy for her efforts and apparent bona fides. One member of the committee commented suspiciously that when Mowlam met the group as Labour spokesman, the issue of the Garvaghy Road "was black and white. Now [that she's Secretary of State], its gray."

3. MacCionnaith asked whether the Irish Government would send an observer to help balance the field. I said that the idea of a neutral observer was a fair one in all the circumstances but that our presence - which would not be considered neutral- might well mean that the Orange Order would take to the hills and collapse the process. They neither agreed nor disagreed (presumably because that eventually would relieve of them burden of the proximity talks).

4. They did not believe that the Orange Order were willing to discuss the option of not walking on the Garvaghy Road. On the other hand, they did not indicate that they were open to the option of the Orange Order marching the Garvaghy in some shape or form. They repeated their public line that the community needed a breathing space from the pressures and anxieties of Drumcree.

©DFA/2021/51/560

5. Irrespective of progress at the proximity talks, both groups will inevitably wish to take any proposals back to their respective constituencies for agreement. At this stage, it is difficult to envisage such an ingenious compromise that inspires the agreement of the Garvaghy community - which is very set against "Orange feet on the Garvaghy", particularly in light of Robert Hamil's death recently - and the agreement of the local Portadown lodge, particularly given the strong presence of loyalist paramilitaries and their ilk in the Portadown area, many of whom have doubtless joined the Lodge. (The Garvaghy residents believe that the local lodge may now number 3,000.)

6. They wondered about the veracity of the rumours that Trimble had been given a deal on the Garvaghy in return for supporting (or not undermining) the paper on decommissioning. I said that I was not aware that there was any truth to that; that was not to say that New Labour might, in their pragmatism, view different problems as simply aspects of one solution. [I refrained from saying that Trimble looks suspiciously content.]

7. In the wake of the decision not to send an Irish official to attend the talks as an observer,* I spoke this morning with Eamon Stack. He conveyed the group's sense of disappointment and reiterated their concerns about going in alone, as it were. I said that we took the view, as already conveyed, that the Orange Order would use our presence to their advantage and that, in the event of the process being distinctly injurious to the residents, our subsequent room for manoeuvre would be very limited if we seen as co-owners of the process. The latter point seemed to impress him more than the former. In line with our agreed approach, I said that they should contact me at any point on any point, however minor, and that we would pursue their concerns through the appropriate channels. We agreed to stay in touch to review progress.

Eamonn McKee
Security Section
27 June 1997

PST, PSS
S/S Ó hUiginn
Counsellors A-I Section - Security Section
Messrs. Teahon, ~~Blanchfield~~ & Dalton D/Management
Ambassadors London & Washington
Joint Secretary
ccd 27/6

*. see letter attached

©DFA/2021/51/560