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cc Parades 96

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S/S Ó hUiginn
Counsellors A-I Section
Messrs. Teahon, Donlon & Dalton
Ambassadors London & Washington
~~Joint Secretary~~

Mrs. McK.
Ms O'Brien

ccd 4/12. BOX

Anglo-Irish Secretariat
Belfast

Secure Fax: 1181

3 December 1996 **No of pages including this one: 3**

For: Colm O Floinn **From: Kieran Dowling**

Subj: attacks on Catholics going to our Lady of Mercy church, Harryville

1. Following on from our previous representations, we raised with the British side here yesterday the very serious disturbances which occurred at the Harryville church on Saturday evening, 30 November.

2. We welcomed the action taken by the RUC to escort worshippers to the church (as you know, several officers were slightly hurt in the disturbances). At the same time, we expressed concern at the very disturbing separate attacks on two women, one of whom had been savagely dragged from her car. These attacks had been perpetrated somewhat away from the church and pointed to the need to have adequate security in the wider area also, beyond the immediate vicinity of the church itself.

3. The British side today provided us with the attached note setting out the "latest information in relation to the continuing protests by Loyalist demonstrators at this church".

4. As will be seen, it concludes that "the RUC expect the trouble at Harryville to continue. They believe that there will be an attempt to repeat the violence this weekend and consequently at this stage plan to draft in a larger number of officers to deal with the situation. The actions of the protestors will be met robustly."

   The note also indicates that, arising from the disturbances on 30 November, "one arrest was made, though the RUC expect more to follow".

4. We will continue to monitor developments.

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1181/2

NOTE TO THE IRISH SIDE: OUR LADY OF MERCY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, BALLYMENA - CONTINUING PROTESTS

You will be interested in the latest information in relation to the continuing protests by Loyalist demonstrators at this church.

Background

You will be aware that in early September, pickets appeared outside a number of Roman Catholic churches in unionist parts of the North Antrim area. It was claimed these pickets were in retaliation for the blockading of an Orange Order church parade in Dunloy on 8 September though there was also speculation it was linked to the boycott of Protestant businesses. On the first weekend of the pickets around 400 Loyalists took part. Church-goers were able to attend services at Bushmills and Dervock but the Mass at Harryville had to be abandoned. Parishioners were subject to verbal abuse and on isolated occurrences there was some jostling and pushing.

The pickets have continued since. The demonstrations petered out in Bushmills and Dervock, though a hard-core element continue to picket the Saturday night Mass in Harryville, Ballymena. After the first week of picketing, the RUC prevented demonstrators from physically blockading the church gates at Ballymena by containing them behind police lines. This has on occasions led to scuffles between the police and protestors. A number of RUC members have been injured and several arrests made.

Unrest on 30 November

With passing time, the numbers attending the pickets decreased. Last weekend (24 November) there was widespread speculation that the Orange Order who had re-arranged their Dunloy church parade, would not be opposed by local residents. There were indications that if this happened the pickets would be withdrawn from Ballymena. Consequently on Saturday 23 November the numbers attending the protest at the Ballymena church reduced considerably. Optimism however that this might spell an end to the matter proved unfounded as the Orange Order were prevented from holding their parade in

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Dunloy by local residents (and it is claimed by others who were not residents of the village). The RUC subsequently expected trouble at Harryville on 30 November and blocked off streets leading to the church. Around 300-500 protesters turned up, some of whom hi-jacked a lorry and from behind this barricade attacked police lines with bricks, bottles and several petrol bombs. In the worst incident an Ulsterbus was hi-jacked and burned out. Several RUC officers were injured and one arrest was made, though the RUC expect more to follow.

RUC Action

The RUC expect the trouble at Harryville to continue. They believe there will be an attempt to repeat the violence this weekend and consequently at this stage plan to draft in a larger number of officers to deal with the situation. The actions of the protesters will be met robustly.

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FOR: BRIGID BYRNE/EMBASSY, LONDON **FROM**: K. Dowling

DATE: 3 DECEMBER 1996 **PAGES**: 4

Harryville: Interview with Ballymena Councillors Maurice Mills, DUP and PJ McAvoy, SDLP

BBC Good Morning Ulster

3 December 1996

Interviewer Now, you're going to go and meet with the Chief Constable, this was a unaminious decision of the Council, will the DUP, Mr Mills, have the same agenda for that meeting as the SDLP ?

Mills I think that remains to be seen. I would hope that we would have the same agenda. Could I set the scene in this. There's been a chapel in Harryville for thirty years or more, Harryville's population is some ninety to ninety five percent of Protestant persuasion. Now, in all those thirty years I cannot recollect any single unsavoury incident directed against the chapel or those who have attended it. Now, what has happened from the July period, there was, in our opinion, a crazy decision for the RUC to block Orangemen from marching back from their place of worship at Drumcree and that in turn brought about protests in Harryville and certain unruly elements entered into the realm of violence at that time.

Interviewer Yes, I think we're probably all aware of that, Councillor.

Mills I'm not so sure that everyone is aware of it, with respect. The situation has been further exacerbated by another daft decision on the part of the RUC, to stop an Orange Church service at Dunloy.

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Interviewer Well, I think we're aware of that too, actually, with respect, and I know that that took up a great deal of the discussion last night, but you must still see, surely, that the people who wish to worship at Harryville on a Saturday night find it difficult to understand why they ended up in a situation that they did last Saturday night, because of those, if you like, historical difficulties.

Mills Could I say that I have not been at any of the protests, I have not been involved, I am not involved in the organisation of it nor is our party.

Interviewer You don't think you should maybe be there as a Councillor trying to stop them from happening ?

Mills Well, this is what I am seeking to do now through the medium of the Council, to see if we can get this problem alleviated. Each and every individual has the right to go, under civil and religious liberty, to their chosen place of worship, there's not doubt about that. I have no dispute with that.

Interviewer When you go to see the Chief Constable, Councillor McAvoy, what points will you be making to him ?

McAvoy Well, I think, really that the whole problem at Harryville is escalated now to something beyond what you would call a protest. The violence that occurred there last Saturday night, is really, in my opinion and many other people's opinion, a method of trying to maybe resolve the situation to the fact that Catholic services no longer take place in Harryville and that's what I feel. Many people now feel that they are being intimidated, especially the ones who were injured last week and the fact that, you know, it takes so many police now to ensure that people actually have to get to mass.

Interviewer What actions would you like to see. The Council's going to meet with the Chief Constable, obviously. Do you think that it should have been taking a more pro-active role up to now. There seems to have been a singular lack of any, if you like, local

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leadership on the ground on these Saturday evenings and a singular lack of support perhaps for those people who, as Councillor Mills says, have a perfect right to exercise their religious liberty and go to their place of worship when and if they choose ?

McAvoy Well, I think up to this stage basically everybody was depending on the RUC to ensure that people did have that right and be able to get to their church. I think that people also feel that the Council should have taken a more active role by leadership, but nevertheless, the fact of the matter was, up until now it really was a protest - some skirmishes among the protestors with the police. But look, as I say, last Saturday night that all changed.

Interviewer What's your view on the situation now, Councillor Mills, particularly after the violence that we saw last Saturday night and the stories that I'm sure you either saw or heard, the people yesterday who were terrified by what had happened and all they were trying to do was go to church. Do you feel that this is now, perhaps, casting a shadow on the protest that you and many people like you wish to make about the fact that the Orange Order has been unable to walk through Dunloy ?

Mills Once violence rears its head, whenever you get a few of an unruly element who seek to burn a bus or buses or damage and smash vehicles etc., then obviously the situation is getting out of hand and that's why now the Council are seeking to do something. The problems as far as the Council has been concerned is they are unable, as is everybody else, unable to identify the leaders of the various groups who are involved in this protest.

Interviewer And you don't feel that any political grouping has any control over them at all.

Mills I don't think that any political party grouping has any control over them whatsoever.

END.

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DUP meeting led by Ian Paisley
to meet Chief Constable this afternoon
BBC Radio Ulster news - 11am

3 December 1996

Commentator A DUP delegation led by Ian Paisley is to have a meeting with the RUC Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan this afternoon. It's expected they'll be raising the violence in Ballymena, among other issues.

END.

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FOR: BRIGID BYRNE/EMBASSY, LONDON **FROM**: M. Tierney

DATE: 3 DECEMBER 1996 **PAGES**: 2

Comments by the Rev Ian Paisley in relation to the Harryville protest
BBC 1 Northern Ireland - 3 December 1996

Paisley Unfortunately in the minds of right thinking decent people feel that the police didn't deal with those who blocked the road against a church parade, to the Presbyterian church in Dunloy but they took a very heavy hand in the legitimate protest at Harryville before this violence broke out. I am not justifying.

Commentator The RUC has said people on the fringes of Loyalist paramilitary organisations are involved in the protest at Harryville, but that's being denied by the Ulster Democratic Party.

David Adams I actually think it's a situation that's got totally out of hand. I personally and as a representative of the Ulster Democratic Party, totally disagree with anyone who is attempting to stop people going to their place of worship.

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Confidential

Harryville - Conversation with SDLP Councillor Declan O'Loan

2 December 1996

In a conversation with Declan O'Loan, SDLP councillor in Ballymena, the following points of interest arose regarding the weekend's events;

- The violence he witnessed was "very, very serious" and such that he was wondering where to go from here vis a vis resolving the issue. The next few weeks were likely to be very difficult.

- It was very much a leaderless mob outside the church. Ian Paisley Jr was not evident [his standing with the protestors is not high at any rate) and no local DUP councillor has lent support to the protests. O'Loan did not suspect that it was organised; the local grapevine was enough to explain the turnout. He thought that the phones were busy assembling support in the wake of the events in Dunloy the previous week in which the Orange Order's march had been frustrated. The mob undoubtedly involved people drawn in from villages in the hinterland.

- The attacks on the two women in separate incidents (a brick through a windscreen in one and a woman dragged from her car in the other) were very disturbing. He said that the RUC did not allow the protesters to assemble at the Church. Frustrated by this, the mob roamed in search of objects on which to vent themselves and both women were caught up in this (as was O'Loan). O'Loan said the degree of rage could be measured by the fact that the car from which the woman had been dragged had every panel and widow damaged.

- O'Loan said that the very lack of leadership was problematic in that there was no one with whom to engage in talks. He felt that Ian Paisley (senior) was best placed to effect some resolution if he could be persuaded to do so. O'Loan was currently discussing an approach to Paisley with Hume. Ultimately, O'Loan believed that the trouble could be resolved (presumably for the winter at least) if a parade was permitted in Dunloy and he personally believed that many in Dunloy, including the Residents and Parents Association, favoured allowing a parade simply to resolve the matter.

Eamonn McKee
Security Section
2 December 1996

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FOR: BRIGID BYRNE/EMBASSY, LONDON **FROM**: K. DOWLING

DATE: 2 DECEMBER 1996 **PAGES**: 1

1252.

Reactions to attacks on Catholic Churches on Saturday night on BBC Radio Ulster Newsbreak, 2 December 1996

Commentator: The Bishop of Down and Conor, Dr. Patrick Walshe, has described an arson attack on a Catholic Church in Greenisland as the ugly face of sectarianism. A number of windows were broken and the interior of St. Colman's in Station Road set alight. Seats and fittings were damaged in the attack which happened just after midnight. Bishop Walshe said he was appalled at what had taken place.

Walshe: We had quite a number of attacks in various parts of the city here, including our schools, and it's just the ugly face of sectarianism, I'm afraid one has just got to say that. To think everything that is happening at the moment is very sad and to attack a place of worship, you know, it's the lowest form of sectarianism and I think it is appalling that this act should have taken place.

Commentator: The Church of Ireland Primate, Dr. Robert Eames, says he's disgusted to learn of the sectarianism attacks which he says are an utter disgrace to the community. The North Belfast Sinn Féin Councillor, Joe Austen, said Loyalists protesting outside Harryville Church were adding significantly to the heightening of tensions. And the Workers Party have called on the Forum to set up a special committee to work towards wiping out sectarianism.

END.

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FOR: BRIGID BYRNE/EMBASSY, LONDON **FROM**: K. DOWLING

DATE: 2 DECEMBER 1996 **PAGES**: 1

Comments by Ian Paisley following rioting outside a Catholic Church in Harryville in Ballymena on Saturday night on BBC Radio Ulster News, 2 December 1996

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Commentator: The DUP leader, Ian Paisley, has condemned the rioting outside a Catholic Church in Harryville in Ballymena on Saturday night. He blamed Loyalist paramilitaries for orchestrating the trouble and he said his party would be having talks with senior police officers to discuss the situation. Three members of the congregation and a number of police officers were hurt in disturbances on Saturday night when petrol bombs and missiles were thrown. Dr. Paisley says everyone has the right to worship freely.

Paisley: In the ethos of Protestantism there is no place for those that attack anybody going to their desired place of worship. You may not agree with what takes place in that place of worship, you may not agree with the doctrine that is preached there but they have the same right as any other body of people acting within the law to worship according to the dictates of their conscience.

END.

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