

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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To: Dan Mulhall
Fax Nr.: Press Section
From: Michael Gaffey
Date: 13 July 1998
Pages: 3, including this cover sheet.

14/7.

Subject: **Evening Standard Editorial**

Please copy Anglo-Irish Division

Attached is a copy of the main editorial in this afternoon's (London) Evening Standard, headed "The ugly face of Unionism". The editorial contains a remarkably strong criticism of the Orange Order as "the symbol of all that is ugliest in Ulster society" and a call on the people of Northern Ireland to defy "the traditional tribal loyalites which have brought them so many years of misery".

The Evening Standard is London's newspaper and although its readership, of around 500,000, is not in the same league as the national tabloids, it is taken very seriously by the New Labour Government as an influence on public opinion in the capital. The editor, Max Hastings, has been a Northern Ireland correspondent in the past and has close military and security contacts. The editorial appears on a day on which the British media have been unanimous in the view that the Portadown Orangemen should call off their protest at Drumcree. Perhaps more significantly, there has also been a very definite distancing from the Order by commentators and papers which in the past have tended to present the benign side of the Order, as representatives of a British community under pressure, to a generally baffled if not outrightly hostile British public. This distancing is accompanied by signs of an impatience with Northern Ireland not seen for some time in the British media - which may have political implications.

The moment at which the public relations disaster of Drumcree probably became absolute for the Orange Order was when the RUC released its video of a man firing at the police from the among the crowd of protestors. Martin Fletcher in the Times and Toby Harnden in the Daily Telegraph have been highlighting for several days the extent of sectarian violence surrounding the Drumcree protest. Today, Harnden, who

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as the Telegraph's Irish Correspondent, has relied heavily on security force briefings, went so far as to state in one of his reports that "the Orange monolith has been broken....never again, it seems. will the Orange Order exercise the power to impose its will on the rest of Northern Ireland". The editor, Charles Moore, whose staunch unionism has at times this year verged on the rabid, joined the chorus of calls on the Portadown Orangemen to end their protest, while asserting the paper's support for their right to march on the Garvaghy Road. He could not, however, resist an attack on the British Government as bearing the main responsibility for "undermining the rule of law" and Dean Godson's comment piece conveyed a sense of bitterness at the position in which the Orange Order now finds itself; there was, perhaps, also a note of slightly aggressive self-pity.

In a very strong editorial under the Cromwellian quote, "In the Name of God, Go", the Times, while still defending the Orangemen as "stubborn, firghtened and politically naive" also strongly criticised the Order for "fanning the sectarian tension which led.....to the murders in Ballymoney" and noted that "these deaths lie heavy on the Orange Order". It noted that "most Britons are baffled" by the Order and condemned it for not cancelling "all parades on this miserable anniversary of the Boyne".

The other broadly "Conservative and Unionist" newspaper, the Daily Mail also took an unprecedently hostile line on the role of the Orange Order. While the view is being promoted in some media circles that William Bingham is now the main hope for the revitalising of the Orange Order, it is notable that the Daily Mail praised his statement yesterday but characterised him as "a chastened protaganist".

It is clear that the Orange Order's handling of the past week's events and especially of its reaction to the tragedy at Ballymoney has left it for now without friends in the British media. It has also given a breathing space to David Trimble within the Ulster Unionist Party, although Jeffrey Donaldson's call this afternoon for a realignment within unionism provides evidence of the extent of his problems. You will have noted that the Prime Minister's spokesman, Alastair Campbell, moved swiftly this morning in his lobby briefing to state that the weekend's events had strengthened the Agreement and the peace process.

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