

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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FIRST MEETING WITH GRRC: 1000 HOURS

Opening the meeting, Mr MacCionnaith made a number of points.

- The GRRC had a preference for face to face talks.

- The GRRC had requested a meeting with the Prime Minister before proximity talks.

- The GRRC had pointed out in November that December was difficult for them. They had not been able to put together the full team. This meant problems with continuity.

- The GRRC had pencilled in a meeting with the Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs today but had had cancel this for proximity talks.

- The Residents had major problems with the notification arrangements for the talks. They had not received formal notification until Monday, but had read reports in the Sunday Times over the weekend.

- Adam Ingram was visiting Portadown, meeting traders and visiting the town and meeting local councillors. The Residents had asked for this trip to be postponed. If Mr Ingram was to meet local councillors, two elected representatives present at proximity talks would not be able to be present. The Residents needed to be clear whether there was one process going on or two.

- The GRRC had concerns about Alistair Graham's recent comments. The Parades Commission could not take the Orange Order's attendance at proximity talks as representing a degree of engagement enough to overturn their recent rulings.

- The GRRC handed over three copies of a document for the Government and for the facilitators only. They suggested resuming the meeting when the Government side had had a chance to read the document.

2. Mr MacCionnaith stressed the Government needed to acknowledge that the first four of these points represented concessions by the GRRC.

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Mr Powell agreed to consider the GRRC document. Responding to the Residents' points.

- The Government recognised the GRRC's position on contacts. The Government itself is flexible on the format to be taken.

- The meeting with the Prime Minister had only been requested on Sunday. The Prime Minister was happy to meet the Residents but a meeting could not be organised in such short time. The Orange Order had requested their meeting, which discussed a wider range of issues than just Portadown, several months in advance.

- The communication issue was clearly a difficulty. We would look into it.

- On the date of the meeting we had made a number of suggestions seeking to identify the most convenient date for the GRRC. We thought it was, however, important to have a meeting to prevent tension increasing over the Christmas holiday period.

- On the meeting with the Irish Foreign Minister, he understood the DFA would be setting up another meeting although this was of course a matter for them.

- As far Mr Ingram's visit to Portadown, this was an entirely separate process. Mr Ingram was there in his capacity as Minister responsible for trade. The lunch and the tour of the town were not going ahead, and the only elected representative at the meeting would be the Mayor of Craigavon, who had invited the Minister. Mr Powell recognised the confusion that might be caused, and asked if any statement would help clear up concerns local residents might have.

- On the Parades Commission, it would be inappropriate for the Government to make any undertakings on behalf of the Commission. The Government would not give any assessment of today's talks to the Parades Commission. Mr Powell suggested the GRRC take up their concerns with the Parades Commission direct.

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4. On timing of today's talks, Mr MacCionnaith said there was another meeting with the local community scheduled for 8pm tonight and the GRRC delegation needed to be back for that.

5. The meeting ended at 1025 hours.

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SECOND MEETING WITH GRRC: 1050 – 1150 HOURS

Mr Powell opened the meeting by responding to points raised by the GRRC in the previous meeting.

- The Government recognised the concessions the GRRC had made in attending proximity talks.
- We were committed to setting up a meeting with the Prime Minister as soon as possible.
- The Government would not give any assessment of today's talks to the Parades Commission.
- We noted the examples of intimidation outlined in the GRRC's document. All right thinking people would condemn such disgusting actions.

2. The intimidation and other acts of violence outlined in the document were policing issues which needed to be addressed in their own right. But they were also linked to wider problems which needed to be tackled.

3 There were two intertwining issues. One was tackling problems of deprivation and exclusion in the Portadown area. The GRRC believed this could best be done through a civic forum. The second was the issue of parades. The GRRC clearly put the emphasis on one side of the equation, and the Orange Order on the other.

4. Mr Quinn suggested the way forward might be for Mr McCusker to deal directly with the GRRC on the Forum, subject to any general points the Residents wanted to raise now. Mr Powell agreed that the Orange Order were happy in principle with the idea of a civic forum. We were clear that finance needed to be targeted on depressed areas and allocated on the basis of need. Others in the Portadown area might not agree with that, but our position is clear.

5 Mr MacCionnaith raised the issue of response to intimidation and illegal parades. According to the police, there had only been 51 charges for public order offences with only 24 successful convictions since the July standoff, in a period when there had been over 110 illegal demonstrations. Those protesting at Drumcree were there in defiance of the Parades Commission's ruling, but no

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action has been taken. Had similar action been taken by Nationalists they would have experienced a very different police response.

6. In July the Residents had been flexible on the issue of future parades. Experience over the last 6 months had put in question the GRRC's ability to show flexibility. In the bilateral meeting of 18 September both sides had agreed a statement acknowledging a shared responsibility to encourage mutual respect. The Orange Order were in breach of this, and showed no attempt to fulfil their undertakings.

7. Mr Powell pointed to the high cost for the police of policing the demonstrations, with one officer killed in the course of his duty and many others injured. The Orange Order said they had used their influence to try to stop protests, especially in the town centre. On the latter, they had been successful. We had also urged the Order to stop the protests on the hill. Mr Leach stressed the RUC were doing their best to control the situation. He urged the Residents to make contact with new RUC commanders. The RUC were operationally independent, and it would not be for us to instruct them.

8. Mr MacCionnaith said despite police promises they were not often able to make contact with senior police officers on the ground. He reiterated that despite the new offences created in the parades legislation, there had been no prosecutions yet under it. This was despite the fact that the continuing protests in Drumcree were in defiance of the Parades Commission's ruling.

9. Mr Powell returned to the suggestions raised so far on addressing the overall problem. These were for a sub-group to deal with a civic forum, and for discussions on future marches.

10. Mr MacCionnaith replied that the GRRC did not have its full team on social and economic issues. There was a wide gap between the GRRC position and that of the Government on the Civic Forum. For example, the GRRC was concerned about attempts to extend the Forum's area of responsibility beyond the town of Portadown. The GRRC saw this as a dilution of the Forum's purpose. The Forum and other new mechanisms needed to also take account of TSN and PAFT implications and future legislation following on from the Equality sections of the Good Friday Agreement. He indicated that Craigavon partnership had allocated £1 million with only £24,000 going to Nationalist areas in Portadown despite Corcrain ward being the most impoverished in the area.

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11. Mr McCusker stressed the Government's commitment to allocating money on the basis of need. Mr MacCionnaith said the GRRC was also concerned about representation on the forum. It should be equal. In Derry, Unionists were asking for a 50/50 split in the Shared City Forum which he understood was likely to be conceded. The Portadown structure as planned would reinforce the Nationalist community's feelings of isolation.

12. As for future marches, the GRRC's July position was not the same as today's. They sensed community opposition even to participating in today's proximity talks. The ongoing situation resulting from Orange Order demonstrations was cutting the ground from under the GRRC's feet in seeking accommodation. The GRRC stood by their September statement, and believed the Orange Order were not living up to their responsibilities. Residents need an immediate gesture with a moratorium on the parades and protests called over the Christmas and New Year period.

13. Mr Powell asked what to tell the Orange Order would be the likely result of such a moratorium. Mr MacCionnaith said the important thing was for people to fulfil the obligations they had already made. In the past HMG had refused access to political processes to those supporting violence. In the Residents' view the Orange Order were actively engaged in violence. The Orange Order could exercise influence on the protests. On the Nationalist side, there had been very little violence over the last 6 months, as a result of community leaders exercising their influence.

14. Mr Powell asked whether, if the Orange Order called off protests over Christmas, the Residents would accept the possibility of future marches in principle. Mr MacCionnaith said a gesture of this sort would enable the GRRC to go back to the community to readopt the position of July. Mr Powell stressed that all issues needed to be discussed in parallel without conceding anything at this stage, otherwise negotiations would not get far.

15. Mr MacCionnaith outlined the GRRC's July position, which might be readopted. The Residents had been prepared to see an Orange parade going from Corcrain up the Dungannon Road to Drumcree. On 5 July, the parade could go to Drumcree and return by the same route or disperse. Residents would see this as a reciprocation of their gesture in 1995. They also wanted a civic forum in Portadown and face to face dialogue between residents and the Order. If all of these were achieved, the GRRC had undertook to encourage dialogue within the community, covering the scope for Orange parades on the Garvaghy Road next year and in future years.

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16. Mr Powell said the prospects for agreement would be better if the Residents could give a taste of what flexibility on their part over parades might mean in practice. Mr MacCionnaith stressed the GRRC did not have a free hand. In the event of a moratorium they would go back to the community and ask for flexibility to reciprocate. In those circumstances there could be rapid and substantial progress.

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THIRD MEETING WITH GRRC: 1725 HOURS

Mr Fewell presented a possible draft statement. Mr MacCionnaith asked for half an hour to consider it. Meeting ended at 1728 hours.

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FOURTH MEETING WITH GRRC: 1820 HOURS

Mr MacCionnaith asked for details of all charges under the new parades legislation, broken down between Portadown and the rest of Northern Ireland. He asked for the information within the next 7-10 days. Mr MacCionnaith presented a revised statement, with some amended text, and some text from the GRRC's original draft restored.

2 On subsection (v), Mr MacCionnaith said the Residents were not prepared to negotiate beyond what was in the second tiret. The GRRC felt that the only traditional parade on the Garvaghy Road was that on the Sunday before 12 July. For 1998 this was already passed, so the next issue which arose was the July parade for 1999.

3 It was agreed to show the revised text to the Orange Order. The meeting ended at 1830 hours.

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Confuckingtinued

Powell not knowing about Ingram in Portadown.

Absence of any gameplan for the day - irony of Leach being there.....NIO seemed content to see the day out watching Powell bounce between the two sides.....Whether this was obvious to Powell ...?

The afternoon was apparently spent in talks within the British delegation on amendments to the text and possible with some tentative discussions with the Orange Order. The residents waited patiently wondering at times what the Orange might offer but most satisfied that the Orange would be unable to move off their search for a date for a march. Peter Quinn appeared to assure them that this was the most likely outcome and to advise that when the break came, the residents must position themselves as favourably as possible.

The British delegation returned with an amended text (annex 2), the key point of which was (v) - that Watson and MacCionnaith would meet to agree a date for a march before July 1999 (i.e. the return leg). This probably represented as far as Watson could go and as such a concession in that 31 December was not explicitly mentioned as a parade deadline. The residents amended the text (annex 3) and this was offered to the Orange side. Their response text was elicited on the basis that Powell had to leave by 9.10 pm to catch a flight to London. This text (annex 4) contained some elements of the residents' paper but offered a moratorium on parades only on the basis of a guaranteed parade before 31 December and the assurance of parades for the future. At that point the process ended and both sides finalised their press releases (residents' one attached).

In conversation, Powell expressed his exasperation at the unwillingness or inability of the Orange side to negotiate. McCusker felt that the day had got off to a better start than anyone had imagined and agreed that it would have been a good start to a longer process. Privately, Powell said that the Orange would not get in December what they had failed to get in July and that he would talk sternly to them about the need to act lawfully over the coming weeks. As far as he was concerned, the rush of disorder would have to be borne and that any resumption of the talks process would wait until January.

The residents left content that they had seriously engaged in the talks, aware that the British had bought into their paper and that the Orange remained so idiotically fixated on completing their march that they had virtually incapble of negotiation.

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