

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Cf. Stage - Section

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22 JAN 1999

Confidential

Drumcree - Indications of Orange Order Intentions, 22 January 1999

Mr McCarthy passed on to the Taoiseach 25/1/99

The following points have been gleamed from a number of sources:

1. The outcome of the meeting between the Portadown Orange delegation and PM Blair on 8 December was agreement to proceed with a review of culture in Northern Ireland. This vehicle would seek to address the Portadown Orange's view that Orange culture was under siege and needed nurturing. While Denis Watson, the Co. Armagh Grand Master, is the point of contact between the Orange and Downing Street in correspondence on the proposal, the idea is the child of David McNarry. Once Downing Street gave the go ahead, the proposal was followed up by the NIO. McNarry subsequently suggested Sir George Quigley as the reviewer but NIO soundings indicated that he was not interested. McNarry then suggested Chris Gibson. However, the NIO may have him in mind as a "negotiating counsellor" to the Orange delegation in future proximity talks. David Harkness is also on a list of potential reviewers.

2. The NIO are clearly alert to the accusation that Downing Street/NIO are party to delivering a Portadown Orange demand without any apparent move in return by the Orange Order. They will, accordingly, in their presentation of this idea attempt to portray it as one devoted to *all* expressions of culture in Northern Ireland. In the terms of reference, they are likely to try to camouflage it by reference to the Millennium celebrations and to the language of the Good Friday Agreement. Yet while the NIO intend to consult our side and the First Ministers about the terms of reference, this will mean that there has been no discussion about the merits of the proposal in the first instance and the debate will be about the definition of the proposal rather than the wisdom of it. In what must be an exasperating twist for Downing Street/NIO, the Orange Order have indicated that they will not now participate in the review until they get their parade down the Garvaghy Road - the Orange were insisting it be announced before that meeting and they may fear that it was colonised by the residents at their meeting with PM Blair.

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3. The Orange Order Grand Lodge has given the go-ahead for a two day conference in Belfast at the Waterfront on Orange culture, at a cost of £60,000. This will happen at the outset of the marching season and is clearly designed to raise support for the Order in the trials that lie ahead in the marching season.

4. The "Ulster Volunteer" LOL based at Cliftonville Street in North Belfast is organising a series of marches in the city, over coming months is support of their Portadown Brethren. The south Belfast Ballynefeigh Lodge is concerned that its room for contact with the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community to reach an accommodation will be limited by the contact, if any, agreed between the Portadown Orange and the Garvaghy Road residents. The Ballynafeigh Lodge's Easter march is the first contentious march of the new season.

5. The Portadown district lodges are planning a phase of greater militancy. They believe that without this pressure, there will be no corresponding pressure on the authorities to get them down the road. While Downing Street may wish to see a resolution by the end of February (a wildly optimistic notion), this may not take account of the fact that the Orange would regard their leverage as maximised by what they hope will be progressively heightened tensions from Easter onwards.

6. Harold Gracey is feeling the strain of his vigil on the hill and is personally bereft after the death of his mother. He threatened at the weekend to come off the hill in the wake of last Thursday's violence against Catholics around the Garvaghy Road and it took a lot of persuasion by his fellow brethren to keep him there (this is obviously a very sensitive point).

7. There is apparently a rota of sorts in operation with Tyrone Orangemen on duty against the Garvaghy on Thursday evenings (which begs the question why the RUC do not turn them back before they get into the area). Joel Patton's Spirit of Drumcree group has a strong base in the Tyrone area.

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Comment

8. While various elements and factions of the Orange Order (Portadown hardliners, Spirit of Drumcree ideologues. DUP members, No-campaigners and loyalist thugs) are evidently trying to rouse their fellow brethren in support of the Drumcree protest (and in parallel against the Agreement), this may be interpreted as evidence of their fear that the coming marching season may not ignite the kind of mass mobilisation they wish. Harold Gracey's instinct to come off the hill should not be exaggerated but it can be seen as symbolic of the struggle in the hearts of many Orangemen between their desire to champion their cause and their aversion to the means others have employed to that end. The wisdom of the British Government's appeasement of the most violent and destructive wing of the Orange Order - in sponsoring their cultural review and in the RUC's failure to enforce the law on parades and public order generally in Portadown - must be open to serious question.

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