

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Mr McGarry
16.8.99

Apprentice Boys Parades

1. Visit to LOCC, Lower Ormeau Road, Belfast, 11 August 1999.

I met with Gerard Rice, John Gormley, Ian Cameron and Michael Goodman.

They were angry and frustrated at the determination of the Parades Commission on the Apprentice Boys' Lower Ormeau march. They felt that only one criterion had been used i.e. the fact of dialogue by the Apprentice Boys. In their view dialogue was not an end in itself. It was the product of dialogue which should weigh with the Parades commission not the fact of it.

They were frustrated that neither the AB nor the PC would accept any argument based on the nature of the parade itself and the sensitivity of the community to it. The Parish Priest, Fr. Curran, had put substantial arguments to the commission demonstrating that the parade itself in current circumstances was not acceptable. These were rejected.

The community had offered a compromise i.e. crossing the Ormeau bridge and then turning off to the left. This they claimed was rejected by Alistair Graham on the grounds that there was no Catholic housing on the proposed route . He is reported as saying that he represented a "parades Commission not a non-Parades Commission". The residents interpretation of the Parades Commission basic approach was that it intended to send a positive signal to the Loyal Orders and that it had taken its line from PM Blair following its meeting with him.

Implications of the determination

The residents had met the night before and considered that the decision was pushing them back to square one i.e. to 1969 on the very day of the 30th anniversary of the 1969 Apprentice Boys March which had precipitated the Troubles.

The residents were now painted into a corner with no choice but to oppose particularly in light of the implications both locally (for marches in August, September and October and throughout the North, Garvaghy, Bellaghy etc.)

It was clearly implied that the residents wished to block the march in order to prevent the Ormeau Road parade becoming "the thin edge of the wedge". A repressive reaction from the RUC (curfew plus violence in the street) was anticipated. This would have a knock-on effect later in the day in Derry. More fundamentally if matters slid in this direction it could have a negative effect on the Republican movement's approach to the September review of the Good Friday Agreement.

The group stressed that the residents were feeling particularly isolated and needed, at this particular juncture, to be seen to have the support of the Irish Government. A sufficiently positive statement could help calm the residents' fears about the broad implications of the decision and could influence them in the direction of purely

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peaceful protest . They looked to the Irish Government as the guarantor of their rights.

They suggested that a statement might contain the following elements

(i) A restatement of the first principles (derived from the North report) which are to be applied in making determinations on Parades.

(ii) A reminder that decisions on the desirability of holding a parade need to address not only matters of form and style but also the nature of the parade itself, its history, and particular sensitivities of the community (such as the Sean Graham site)

(iii) All of the Parades Commission criteria must be fairly and equitably applied taking all relevant circumstances into account

(iv) There must be no predetermination of outcome even when dialogue takes place.

I said that the Irish Government was monitoring the situation very closely, that it had already taken up the question of the application of the criteria with the British side through the Joint Secretariat and would continue to make representations. It was intended to review the various decisions of the Commission in early Autumn in light of its recent change of rules. We would be glad to have input from the various residents groups in the context of that review. We had to date supported the independence of the Commission in its work (which often had negative outcomes for the Loyalist side) and did not think it would serve anybody's interests to undermine it now. However I had listened carefully, would fully report the concerns of the Group at a high level and would work to see what helpful action the Government might take in the coming days.

Gormley and Rice left for Derry immediately following the meeting.

2. **Gerry O'Hara, SF, Derry**

I spoke to O'Hara this morning. The Ormeau Road delegation had got a standing ovation at a large public meeting in Derry last night. The "blood was up" If there were scenes of violence in Belfast on Saturday morning it would spread to Derry. There would be black smoke over Derry and Belfast by evening.

He considered that A. Graham had behaved with great stupidity in relation to the Lower Ormeau. In Derry they had worked very hard to bring about a situation where all would have had a victory. This had now been destroyed by the Belfast decision.

The key to a peaceful resolution lay with the Ballynafeigh Apprentice Boys. If they voluntarily re-routed the situation would be defused; they would gain the moral high ground and additional ground in Derry. Currently the Commission was rewarding loyalists for entering talks and punishing nationalists for doing so.

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3. **Aidan McAteer, SF, Belfast**

Relative to the Parades he said the signs were ominous. A number of Sinn Féin Councillors had met with the Commission and had come away with the impression that larger political consideration lay behind the Ormeau Road decision with direct implications for the Garvaghy Road. Whether dialogue (between residents and the Loyal Orders) was meaningful or not it would be regarded by the Parades Commission as the crucial step (on the way to a determination in favour of parades).

Sinn Féin intended to put as many responsible people as possible on the Ormeau Road to keep the situation calm The situation would be worse in Derry and he was not optimistic that they would be capable of keeping the situation under control there. SF was not ambivalent relative to violent street protests . Martin McGuinness would be there to appeal for calm but anticipated a direct challenge to Sinn Féin efforts. McGuinness intended to contact Paddy Teahon tomorrow about the situation. (I conveyed this to Wally Kirwan this afternoon)

The behaviour of the RUC would be a crucial determinant in what happens. Their very presence can be considered provocative. It would be extremely counterproductive for them to attempt (as they did three years ago) to saturate the centre of Derry in the early hours of Saturday morning. Sinn Féin could stop e.g. hi- jacking but could not stand between young people and the RUC.

The most positive thing the Irish Government could do now was to assist the communities in overcoming their sense of isolation by expressing some measure of concern about the nature of recent decision made by the Parades Commission. I told him that the Joint Secretary had been recalled from leave and was to review the situation with the British side in the afternoon. The Government was also intending to issue a supportive but balanced statement. He stressed that SF wished to get across to the community that arguments can be won by the political route and not through violence.

4. **Pat Ramsey(SDLP), Mayor of Derry**

Ramsey said the timing of the Ormeau decision was particularly unfortunate. The Commission had been kept closely informed about the proximity talks and was aware that the main discussion centred on the feeder parades. When he had assisted at the launching of the AB supported Maiden City Festival all were truly hopeful of a positive outcome to talks. Even senior police officers were baffled by the timing of Monday's decision.

The Bogside residents had now applied to the Commission to hold a protest march to the Guildhall by way of Shipquay Street. The protesters want to march to the Diamond and remain there at the same time as the Apprentice Boys parade.

He had spent much of the day contacting people, including the local Bishops, to encourage Tommy Cheevers to change the Ormeau route. The Bogside residents would reciprocate such a gesture. He understood that the RUC Chief Constable had

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met Cheevers for two hours this morning but without much success. (The Joint Secretary has since reported that there is a glimmer of hope on the British side that compromise may be possible). The Mayor intended to ask Cheevers to meet him tomorrow (Friday) but was not hopeful that his invitation would be taken up.

Gary Ansbro
Security Section
Anglo-Irish Division
12 August 1999

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