

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Secretary General
You already know the gist of this and aspects of the follow-up, but you may be interested in the full report.

Meeting between Taoiseach and Garvaghy Road delegation, Government Buildings, Dublin, Thursday, 9 September, 1999

7th 9.99.

By arrangement, in response to a request from the Garvaghy Road Residents, a meeting with the Taoiseach took place in Government Buildings, Dublin at 3.45pm on Thursday, 9 September, 1999. The Garvaghy Road delegation consisted of:

Councillor Breandán Mac Cionnaith
Councillor Joe Duffy
A.N. Other

S9, 21A

With the Toaiseach were Assistant Secretary W. Kirwan and Dr. Martin Mansergh, Department of the Taoiseach and Mr Gary Ansbro, Department of Foreign Affairs. This meeting took place in a cordial and relaxed atmosphere. The following report on the exchanges is framed in direct speech but does not purport to be verbatim or exhaustive.

Taoiseach
Did you have a good meeting with Prime Minister Blair, Brendan?

McCionnaith
We did not. We are very concerned about what they intend. At the meeting, we went over all the issues, including reiterating our opposition to proximity talks. Then, Blair came out with stuff about a process to start next Monday, involving political and legal representatives of both sides, as if we had never spoken. We told him we were opposed to proximity talks, as I had told Jonathan Powell on 4 August, on the grounds that they cast us as second class citizens who are not to be met directly. We told Blair he was not going to bounce the residents into a process, with no input from us in designing the process. At the end of the meeting Ingram told us to stay on in Dowing Street and we had some conversation with him. We told him we had heard nothing about the process raised at the meeting and that it looked as if the British were trying to bounce us, and also reverting to square one, with talks about talks but that we would not be bounced. It was left that he would make contact at the end of next week, when he returns from the States. We left No. 10 with this understanding. As far as we are concerned any process would have to be above board, with a clear agenda etc.

As soon as we left Dowing Street, I began to get calls from the media about arrangements for a process commencing on Monday. I met Coleman, PPS to Ingram and told him that if there were to be any misrepresentation of the residents' position, they would turn their backs on any process. Coleman, in the exchanges, more or less hinted or conveyed that the expected outcome of a process was for us to say "yes" to a march.

Taoiseach
Is there a process starting on Monday?

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McCionnaith
Not with us, there isn't. Blair previously told us that he would not force a march down Garvaghy Road, in the teeth of residents' opposition but we wonder are things being set up. The statement issued from Downing Street about the process says that the Parades Commission will be there, as observers. We are worried on the basis of the rubbish process at Ormeau and what followed, that any engagement in dialogue by the Orders may pave the way for the Parades Commission to allow relevant parades. We told Powell before that if they try to put a march down the road, it will take 3,000-4,000 police. When Blair phoned last month from Tuscany, his whole pitch to me was on the basis that a march would go down and that the residents would preserve their dignity (by not actively opposing or blocking it).

Taoiseach
When I spoke to Blair, I made our position clear - that there was a need for real and direct dialogue. I told the Prime Minister directly that there should be no predetermined outcome to any process.

We should use the winter constructively, to find solutions and not wait until 2 weeks before Easter, when it will be too late.

I am glad the we supported having a Parades Commission. Generally, they have worked well and the summer has gone off better than might have been expected, apart from the trouble on the Ormeau Road.

McCionnaith
There were grave grounds for concern about what happened in regard to Ormeau. Also of concern to us is the subtle shift in the rules of Commission, where previously they referred to a "process of engagement" and now refer to a "process of communication". I saw no difference between what I saw on the Ormeau and what happened at Drumcree 2 years ago.

We told Blair that the British would have to take home truths into account.

- that Portadown is the most divided town in the North
- that inequality there is pervasive
- that the atmosphere there is one of tension and fear.

We told him that the first thing that has to happen is to establish a situation where Catholics and Protestants can find common ground. The reality is that there is no neutral space in Portadown.

There are a lot of Protestants in the town who do not support what the Orange want. The first thing has to be: how to get reconciliation in the town. Then it should be up to the Orange Order to convince people why there should be a march on the road. Yesterday, Blair came near to saying: let's have a march and then, other problems can be solved.

Taoiseach
Is there merit in trying to find out what kind of a process would work, covering all the issues?

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McCionnaith
We have been thinking of going for a conflict resolution process, bringing in people from other countries to facilitate.
Some people seem to forget why there are now such a large number of Catholics in Garvaghey and Ballyoran. It is because such a large number of Catholics were forced out of their homes in other areas in the past, especially in the peak period of 1970-73.

Taoiseach
A lot of effort will have to be put in, to design a process to resolve the conflict. You have always said there has to be direct dialogue. Tactically, it is not good to be seen to opt out of resolution processes.

Kirwan
The involvement of Powell has been counterproductive. They do not seem to think out where they are going and the steps ahead.

Taoiseach
We should use the winter to get a proper process. How best to do it is a question : you yourselves to do it or to do it with the Government.

McCionnaith
We are a small community, we don't have the resources. We need Irish Government support and involvement. We need one or more of your people, as where Eamonn McKee acted in the past, sitting in on meetings with Ingram.

Taoiseach
There is a need for the Garvaghey community to escape from the wear and tear of what has been going on in the area.

McCionnaith
A couple of years ago, Will Glendenning, as Chairman of the Community Relations Council came in to meet both sides, but he pulled back, as other processes took over. We are up against it. In the past, there were efforts to bring Catholics and Protestants together on a cross-community basis, but we couldn't get Protestant participants.
If the British took a firm line with the Orange, the more moderate Protestants might have a basis to meet us.

Taoiseach
There is some good in Blair being involved but there is a need to put his involvement into a proper frame.

McCionnaith
We should try to design a process that could be applied more widely across the North. The Ormeau Road people are disillusioned by what happened in July but if we could get the right process, we might be able to get them back in.

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Ansbro
We in out Department have been keeping close touch with Breandán, the Garvaghey residents and other groups. We are certainly ready to help in trying to design a process of resolution of the issues.

Kirwan
Would it be worth involving Peter Quinn in such an effort?

McCionnaith
Yes. His role has been constructive and he has a lot of relevant experience. Other have been involved, too, such as Chris Gibson of the CBI.

Kirwan
I would have thought he would play a positive role...

McCionnaith
We had a meeting with him and Sir George Quigley, as representatives of the G7 Group, as regards possibilities to get new business into the Mayfair Business Centre, near Garvaghey. We were disgusted that they took the line that no money would come into the area, until there had been a march. Gibson was seen as advising the Orange.

Taoiseach
Let's do it - seek to design a process

Kirwan
We could possibly seek the assistance or involvement of people in the South who have experience of dispute resolution.

McCionnaith
We would also like you to ask the Brits to stop what they are doing (this was a reference to the process initiated by No. 10 Downing St.)

Taoiseach
Any process will mean a bit of give and take on all sides.

McCionnaith
Another thing is that there has recently been an increase in Loyalist paramilitary activity in our area - sightings of strange vehicles apparently engaged in targeting. There is a mural in Portadown, suggesting overlaps between the UVF and LVF. Johnny Adair is to be released next week and there is speculation that he may move from Belfast to either Banbridge or Portadown.

Previously, there had been a permanent RUC presence at Craigwell over a long period. It stopped people with malign intent from coming into that part of the read. But when the larger-scale RUC presence was stepped down, those Land Rovers were withdrawn too. This has led to attacks on people and houses there and to an armed gunman being seen to enter the area. We would ask you to try to get it reinstated.

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Taoiseach and Ansbro
We will raise it through the Secretariat.

Walter Kirwan
Assistant Secretary
Northern Ireland Division

15 September, 1999

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