

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Loyalist Feud

cc'd 28.8.00
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SF 905

TO : GARY ANSBRO/FERGAL MYTHEN<D.FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

FROM : BILL NOLAN < BELFAST.

Loyalist Feud.

1. As you will know from media reports, there is a good deal of speculation here that efforts are under way behind the scenes to get mediation talks going in the loyalist feud in north Belfast. There was some speculation too over the weekend that an informal 72-hour truce between the UVF and the UFF/UDA had been brokered, though John White denied any knowledge of this when asked by reporters. There are no reports of any further disturbances in the Shankill area following the last of the funerals on Saturday. Security in the area remains at a high level and police searches of premises, especially in the lower Shankill, appear to be ongoing.

2. Some reports say that "people close to Trimble" are involved in the mediation efforts and Archbishop Eames is being mentioned as a possible mediator.

3. While the air of tension continues in the Crumlin Road/Shankill areas of the north city, this would seem to have eased somewhat in the past few days. The lifting of Adair has had an immediate beneficial effect. One can sense this even among his own 'supporters', who are by no means universally angered by his removal from the scene. Of course, it would be rash to underestimate his ability to continue to influence matters in a malign way even when behind bars. And the non-segregation arrangements etc. at Maghaberry could be an unhelpful factor here. Yesterday's *Sunday Life* had a front page article entitled: *Jail Death Fear - Adair Could Die Like Billy Wright.*

4. The fact that trouble has not spread (so far) to other loyalist parts of Belfast especially, but also to towns such as Portadown, is a further indication that the north city situation is amenable to control if mediation gets under way quickly and if it is sustained even in the face of further killings which may well turn out to be the case.

I thought it strange that so many public figures, including several clerical personnel, should so readily agree with the statements of UVF and UDA spokespersons in recent days that mediation is impossible while scores are being settled. I would hope that this is not a true reflection of the actual situation on the ground in north Belfast and that efforts at ending the feud will, if anything, intensify if there are further killings.

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5. Getting the Shankill situation back to (relative) normality is very important also for another reason. The longer the army remains on the streets of Belfast, the greater is the danger of trouble spreading across interface lines, with the consequent alarming possibility of nationalist youths being drawn back into confrontation with military personnel. The 'resumption' of sectarian hostilities at Duncairn Gardens last night is a worrying reminder of how easily this could happen. Riot police dealt with the situation last night, but one should not forget that there are anti-Agreement elements here quite capable of steering events on the streets of north and west Belfast back towards the traditional 'Army v fenians' format.

6. With the ending of the holiday period, more of the political heavy-weights should be in place from now on to help restore stability. David Ervine made some very good comments on radio yesterday, though he is still out of the country. There is a feeling of a leadership vacuum at all levels and this needs to be tackled quickly. With Adair out of the way and calm prevailing in all other loyalist areas, and with the ending of the marching season, there is now an opportunity for the leaderships of the pro-Agreement parties here to demonstrate very effectively that politics under the new dispensation in NI is working, that the politicians are back in business in a commanding way and not simply responding to events as they happen at the behest of the Johnny Adairs of this world.

END
28 August 2000.

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