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Loyalist Feuding

Meeting with Chris Anderson

26 May 2000

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I met with Chris Anderson, a freelance journalist from Lurgan, in Dublin to discuss the deteriorating situation on the Loyalist side. Anderson, who is a former captain in the UDR, has close links with the LVF in Portadown. He is at present preparing a biography on the murdered LVF leader, Billy Wright, with the full support of Wright's family. He made the following points:

1. The present feud, which has now claimed the lives of at least four people, is likely to escalate further. The present round of killings started with the murder of the UVF commander in Portadown, Robert Jamieson by elements of the LVF. The UVF retaliated by murdering two youths in Tandragee, David McIllwaine and Andrew Robb.

2. The killing on Friday of Martin Taylor in Ballysillian was carried out by a combined UFF and LVF group and followed the attempted murder two days earlier of Robert Kirk. Taylor was a senior UVF figure in the North Belfast area. Kirk has been blamed by the UVF for the murder of Jamieson.

3. Anderson was in no doubt that the UVF would strike back, either at the LVF or the UFF. He said that the credibility of the present UVF leadership, including the PUP politicians Billy Hutchinson and David Ervine, depended on their response to this attack.

4. There is a perception in Loyalist circles that the UVF has gone soft and that their best operatives have retired. According to Anderson, the UVF are now using young raw recruits in their operations. This was clear by the amateurish attempt to kill Kirk where the gunmen fled after making a fairly ineffective effort to shoot him.

5. I asked Anderson about the possibility of the Loyalists escalating their campaign to include attacks on Nationalist figures. He said that if the

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historical pattern of Loyalist feuding is repeated than they will switch their attacks from each other to a common enemy, usually Republicans. Any such switch would bring rapid retaliation from Republican paramilitaries, either the INLA or the Provos (probably using a title of conveniece). Any cross-community violence would have a major destabilising effect on the Peace Process.

6. On Drumcree, Anderson said that the local district branch of the Orange Order accept that they will not have the full backing of the Order for their march in July this year. Many Orangemen, from places like Tyrone and Fermanagh, will be reluctant to get involved in another Drumcree stand-off. Therefore, the period of large mass protest rallies at Drumcree Hill may be in the past.

7. The local organisers, however, are very determined to become more militant to compensate for their loss of support in the Order. They believe that their relatively moderate stance last year brought them no real benefits, despite assurances from the British Government.

8. One option being considered is to push well-known people like Howard Gracey and David Jones into the front line of a protest march and then force them, through crowd pressure, into the police lines where they will inevitably be battened or manhandled in some way. Television pictures of such an incident would do wonders for the Loyalist cause and inflame Protestant opinion.

Ray Bassett
Anglo-Irish Division
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