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La Orange Parade
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Report on contacts with Derry, weekend 11-13 August 1995

1. I remained in contact with Mark Durkan and others in Derry throughout the weekend, 11-13 August, in order to monitor developments and pass on any messages if requested. The SDLP Council group met with RUC Divisional Commander, Tom Craig, around midday on Friday 11th of August, in order to convey an urgent request for an early police decision on the following morning's Apprentice Boys march route. Delaying the decision would simply add to the uncertainty and tension and invite trouble. They made clear that the Nationalist community would not object to the local Apprentice Boys Clubs appearing on the Walls for the first time since 1969, provided they did not march along the section between Butcher's Gate and Bishop's Gate. This would give the marchers about three-quarters of the Walls. Following that mid-day meeting, the SDLP group were a little more optimistic about Craig's intentions. He told them he would meet the Apprentice Boys in the afternoon and communicate his decision to the Mayor of Derry, John Kerr between 6-8 pm in the evening.

2. SDLP optimism about the outcome began to dissipate from early evening onwards. There was no call from Craig, and all efforts to contact him by phone between 8-10 pm were unsuccessful. The Mayor rang me about 10 pm to impart a message of anger and concern: the very scenario they had warned the RUC about earlier in the day was rapidly developing. The Apprentice Boys were gathering in force for a function in Memorial Hall, while a short distance away, Bogside residents were assembling on the Wall. The continuing uncertainty over the extent of the march route and the apparent police indecision on this prompted exchanges of threats and insults. I asked the Secretariat to seek an update on the situation in Derry from the other side.

3. Craig finally made contact with the Mayor around 11 pm. While he would not say that a decision on the route had been made, it was clear the RUC intended to allow the march along the full length of the Wall. Craig made a reference to facilitating some kind of protest by local residents and said there would be no music and banners would be lowered between Butcher's Gate and Bishop's Gate the section in dispute. He also brought two further 'offers' from the Apprentice Boys, which greatly angered the SDLP: the local clubs would not return to the Diamond late in the evening for dispersal after the main parade (this had never been an issue), and they suggested that the question of future march routes could be discussed in the Cultural Affairs Sub-Committee of the Council.

4. When the SDLP group next met with the RUC after midnight, the atmosphere was far more difficult and hostile. Mark Durkan feels this was due to the presence of Assistant Chief Constable Freddie Hall, who had apparently arrived in Derry in the afternoon. The RUC left them with the impression that a trade-off between Derry and the Ormeau Rd. was in the offing. They also tried to enlist the help of the SDLP in getting the protestors on the wall to disperse before morning. When the SDLP refused, the police insisted that the blame for any trouble would lie with the protestors - there was no effort to explain Craig's earlier reference to facilitating a Nationalist protest. The SLDP group felt this second meeting with the RUC in less than twelve hours was not only unhelpful, but something in the nature of a set-up (as indicated above, Mark Durkan had the distinct impression that the RUC had decided on a 'balancing' act; allowing the full route in Derry, while denying Ormeau Bridge to the Apprentice Boys. In the end this proved to be a very misleading impression).

5. In a curious development, Tom Craig telephoned Mark Durkan about 7 am on Saturday morning to offer a kind of personal apology for the turn of events which he clearly knew to be embarrassing for the SDLP in Derry. He tried to convey the impression that the route decision might have been different had it been his decision alone. Later when Mark Durkan and John Tierney went up to the Wall, they found that no-one from the RUC had yet arrived to inform the protestors officially of the route decision. They asked that a message be conveyed to Craig requesting him to come onto the Wall and make arrangements for the appropriate protest he had earlier said he would facilitate. He failed to appear and the protestors were physically removed to enable the Apprentice Boys to commence their parade on Derry's Walls.

6. Both the local and the far larger parade in the afternoon passed off without difficulty. I had a call from Mark Durkan late in the afternoon to report on this and also to complain about RUC conduct after the main march. There were reports that a large body of police had taken up a position in front of the Richmond Centre, where many Derry people tend to shop and socialise on Saturday afternoons. There and elsewhere, youths were repeatedly frisked by police supposedly in drugs searches. As the evening wore on and the police showed no inclination to reduce their presence in and around the Diamond, the confrontation between the youths and the police inevitably escalated, especially around Castle Gate where the Bogside protestors had been corralled earlier in the day. John Tierney called me about 9.30 pm to report that the RUC had been firing plastic bullets in a confined area and he greatly feared that one of the 10-15 year olds involved in the stone-throwing and making of petrol bombs would be hit and seriously injured. I urged him to see if some local community leaders could be persuaded to

appear on the scene and help to calm things down. I also called the Secretariat to suggest contact with the other side about the continuing heavy RUC presence in the City Centre long after the parade had ended.

Summary note and conclusion

7. There is no doubt in Mark Durkan's mind that the RUC, deliberately or otherwise, managed to inflict severe damage on community relations generally and on relations between the Nationalist community and the police in Derry over the weekend, 11-13 August 1995. This is a personal, subjective view, but one which receives much support from the record of police actions at several crucial times during the weekend. The SDLP Council group has for long worked to improve community relations in Derry and feels the RUC have now turned back the clock in a most damaging fashion. What worries Durkan most is that the RUC approach appears to have been decided at a very senior level and an Assistant Chief Constable, Frederick Hall, was sent to Derry to implement this.

8. What could have been a constructive compromise, allowing the Apprentice Boys onto the Walls for the first time in twenty five years, provided they did not march on the section which overlooks the Bogside, was undermined by the actions of the RUC. By attempting to impose what were in effect Apprentice Boys's conditions on the Nationalists, the police showed their support for one side and allowed the Apprentice Boys to evade all attempts to get them into discussions with the other community in Derry. The SDLP sees a sinister RUC hand in this, damaging to the SDLP and damaging to the work of Derry City Council. It may be worth noting that the Wall is owned by the Honorable The Irish Society of Derry (a remnant of the old City of London Guilds which founded the city). In recent times, efforts have been made to work out a suitable arrangement whereby the Wall would be managed by the City Council (much like a city park) and financed by the DoE as a public amenity and tourist attraction. The actions of the RUC, allowing the

Apprentice Boys the full run of the Wall, may well turn out to be a severe set back for this worthy civic project.

9. The two Apprentice Boys parades passed off without difficulty, proving as far as the Nationalist side is concerned that there was objection to their legitimate routes. What is surprising therefore is that the most serious incidents of the day took place well after the main parade. There is great anger in Derry about police actions in Shipquay St. in the late afternoon. A large body of police took up position in front of the Richmond shopping complex for no apparent reason. Land Rovers were lined up behind them and the Inspector in charge stood swinging his baton in what was, to many onlookers, a threatening gesture. I understand there have been many complaints about this incident on local radio in Derry and Donegal today. The general view of citizens who witnessed it appears to be that it was designed to prolong needlessly the disruption caused by the Apprentice Boys march on a normal busy shopping day in Derry. This together with the continued heavy RUC presence in the vicinity of Castle Gate as the evening wore on inevitably led to clashes between the police and local youths. The firing of plastic bullets in a confined area was extremely alarming and could easily have resulted in serious or fatal injuries to youths, many of whom were aged 9 or 10.

10. The overall RUC performance in Derry on 12 August is seen by many as a return to the earlier days of the Troubles. One priest involved in youth activities told Mark Durkan yesterday that he would now have to publicly abandon the clubs' contacts with the local police in order to retain his credibility and standing with the youths involved.

SJ

B. Nolan

14 August, 1995

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