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20876 (S. J. J. J.)

Meeting with Fr. Anthony Mulvey: P.P. Strabane - 16 April 1985.

Fr. Mulvey is the P.P. in the main Strabane parish (Melmont). He was a priest in Derry for over twenty years and served there during the worst period of the troubles. He has been a strong critic of the IRA. He is active on behalf of his parishioners on social and security-related issues but has reservations about priests performing a human rights role in a publicly outspoken way lest this create a pretext for IRA killings..

Relations between the local community and the police in Strabane had been quietly and gradually improving before the most recent army killing. Because of that incident and insensitive police tactics since then, RUC community relations were again bad and the appeal of the IRA and Sinn Fein among young people was on the rise. No one believed the explanation given by the army about the killing viz that they opened fire because they thought that one of the three young men shot was about to open fire.

The local RUC officer in charge of Strabane was a reasonable enough man. The problem with the police lay at senior level and particularly in the person of Assistant Chief Constable James Crutchley who had responsibility for the RUC in the western area.

Crutchley was a member of the RUC reserve in 1969; he may have had some involvement with the Sammy Devenney affair in that year. He is the man who led the RUC into the Bogside on 12 August 1969 and he had done so against the express instructions of MacAtamney (then the Catholic D.I. in Derry, now Deputy Chief Constable). On a tape of police communications monitored at the time Crutchley was apparently recorded as replying to his instruction: "We are going to go in. This is war". He was in the RUC landrover during the killing of Mrs. Norah McCabe by a

plastic bullet in Belfast. Throughout the hunger strike he had slept in his office and was subsequently awarded the OBE for his dedication. Like most senior RUC officers, he is a Free Mason.

John Hume had raised aspects of Crutchley's appointment in Westminster. Fr. Mulvey had let his own concerns be known privately in the matter but he was not sure that his representations would reach Hurd's desk. He hoped we might draw the attention of the British to minority concerns about Crutchley.

The UDR in the Strabane area were not currently a problem. They were involved only in protecting the old railway bridge and as such did not have much contact with the community.

Strabane is, of course, one of the most depressed areas in Northern Ireland. The town centre was devastated by an IRA bombing campaign in the early seventies. There has been some recovery in recent years with reconstruction and cross border trading but unemployment remains at a chronic level.


Anglo-Irish Division

18 April 1985