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Meeting with Brid Rodgers on 18 February 1986

I met with Senator Rodgers in Lurgan on 18 February. During our conversation she raised the following two matters which are exercising the minds of the SDLP in the Portadown-Lurgan area at present:

There is a growing feeling of unease in the Lurgan area about the problem of unaccompanied UDR patrols who now more than ever before carry out check point duty in and around Lurgan without an RUC presence. When she recently questioned the local RUC Superintendent about this he admitted the situation existed and offered as a reason (rather than an excuse) the lack of RUC staff. The feeling within the Nationalist community in Lurgan is that this display is a show of strength by the UDR in defiance of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Another matter of concern to the SDLP in the area is the forthcoming marching season. In this regard their most immediate preoccupation is the Apprentice Boys International Rally which is to be held in Portadown on Easter Monday, the 31 March this year. The organisers have already stated that they will not be deterred from their selected route even if it means confrontation with the RUC. This route will not be made known to the police until 4 days before the event which is the minimum required legal notice.

Earlier that day (18 February) while discussing the local Forresters (National Organisation related to AOH) St. Patrick's Day march in Portadown when a route which did not go through a Protestant area was proposed by the RUC and accepted in a spirit of co-operation by the Forresters, Senator Rodgers requested that Unionist marchers like the

Apprentice Boys March be directed away from Nationalist areas especially the 'Tunnel area' as they had done so successfully last 12 July. The RUC Superintendent while expressing a desire to be helpful said he could not guarantee anything at this time....He remarked however, that as this particular march might be considered more religious in nature than other marches (presumably because it was Easter!) it might not be possible to interfere with its route. Senator Rodgers decided that she could go no further at that level and proposes to talk to the RUC commander for the area Chief Superintendent Ferguson to impress on him the absolute necessity of holding to the demarcations for these marches as laid down last year.

Any return to the sectarian coat-trailing which was a yearly occurrence in Portadown for generations before its landmark abolition last year would come as a sickening blow to the Nationalists not only there but, because of what it represents, all over Northern Ireland. Senator Rodgers also believes it probably would lead to violence.

Liam Canniffe
Liam Canniffe

20 February 1986.

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