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Marley Funeral, 6-8 April 1987

In Belfast on Wednesday, the situation was very tense as people followed the slow and sporadically violent progress of the Marley funeral from his home in the Ardoyne in North Belfast to Milltown Cemetery in West Belfast.

Marley, a PIRA activist, was shot at his home. The UVF claimed responsibility. On Sunday, after negotiations took place between the vicar of Clonard Monastery (in the Ardoyne) and the RUC, an arrangement was agreed whereby the RUC would allow the coffin and the family room to move freely. However, on Monday, 6 April, and Tuesday, because of the manipulation of Sinn Fein/PIRA and the heavy-handedness of the RUC, the funeral was brought to a halt and eventually abandoned.

During those two days, the affair had developed into something of a cause celebre and by the third day, after two nights of violence and intimidation in West Belfast, the funeral cortege, its ranks swollen to ten times their original number, was finally permitted to go ahead. That it did go ahead was largely due to successful negotiations between the RUC and four Catholic priests, sent as emissaries by Bishop Cathal Daly.

The atmosphere was electric all along the slow, winding route from Marley's home to the church, back past Marley's home and then on to the Unity and Divis flats, and along the Falls road to Milltown cemetery.

The Sinn Fein and the PIRA, who had orchestrated the affair all week, manipulated the situation so that there were continuous and violent clashes between the mourners and the RUC.

The residuary feeling in Belfast is that the RUC have again shown themselves to be heavy-handed in dealing with nationalists and many would say that a lot of goodwill which had been built up in the past, has been lost.

While I was in Belfast on Wednesday, 8 April, I was able, with the assistance of Dr. Alisdair McDonnell (SDLP), to get a close-up view of the scene in North/West Belfast during the funeral.

The funeral, which took almost seven hours from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., was quite obviously a stage-managed affair on the part of the PIRA to make as much propaganda as possible. The mourners, who had, I understand, only numbered 200 on Monday, had swollen to 2,000 by Wednesday (in spite of heavy rain) as the coffin left the house, and increased to approximately 6,000 before they had reached Milltown Cemetery in West Belfast.

The RUC had an estimated 600 policemen at the funeral, backed up by army personnel who did not become directly involved in the event. Police landrovers led and followed the cortege. All the streets behind the funeral cortege were immediately blocked as the cortege moved on and the Falls Road remained blocked by the security forces until after the funeral was over.

During the funeral, the Ardoyne was deserted, apart from some children playing on the streets and a few women. It was apparent that the men, many of whom are unemployed in Ardoyne, were either at the funeral or discreetly absent.

Ardoyne is a depressed looking nationalist enclave surrounded on all sides (apart from a tiny tunnel to the Bone and Cliftonville) by predominantly Protestant areas much of which, Dr. McDonnell assured me, was a hardline loyalist stronghold of the UDA/UVF. People there have always lived on the edge of

poverty and each outbreak of sectarian intimidation hit the Ardoyne particularly hard. However, it was pointed out to me by a priest from the Holy Cross Abbey in the area that there has been very little nationalist violence in the locality since 1981.

While in Ardoyne, we met Fr. Peter Loughney, a priest from Holy Cross Abbey in Ardoyne. He told us that the vicar had been the first to speak to the RUC about the funeral arrangements on Sunday evening. Mrs. Marley (wife of the deceased) had agreed to have no paramilitary trappings and had requested that the security forces keep their distance. The RUC agreed to stand back from the coffin and the chief mourners. However, on Monday morning a PIRA group rushed into the vacated space as the coffin was being removed from the Marley house and the RUC charged in an effort to disperse them. At this the widow, obviously distraught, was convinced by Martin Maginnis (who made himself available in the absence of Gerry Adams who was in *Sweden*) to abandon the funeral and return the body to the house. That evening (Monday) Sinn Fein/PIRA runners toured the Ardoyne and parts of West Belfast dropping flyers and calling on the inhabitants to attend the funeral next day, saying that free black taxis would be available to take people to the funeral. Also on Monday evening, the PIRA were active in West Belfast, commandeering and burning vehicles. Dozens of hoax bomb scares were made in many areas of Belfast. By Tuesday morning, the main roads into the city were blocked and tension was very high in North and West Belfast.

Tuesday was almost a repetition of Monday. Bishop Cathal Daly then intervened. Fr. Loughney mentioned that on Sunday and Monday they had looked for both Bishop Caly and Cardinal O Fiaich but both were unavailable. He informed us that it is believed locally that "some people from the security forces" set Mr. Marley up. A number of facts point to this. His assailants apparently knew that he had installed security devices in his house and did not try to break the door down. Instead, they

knocked on his door, waited until he put on the light in the hall and called out who was there before shooting through the door. Their escape route, Fr. Loughney said, was a narrow laneway about 150 yards long which they had to run through before they got to Protestant territory and then to a car. On this particular evening there were unusually no security forces in the area at the time of the incident. It is locally believed that Laurence Marley, who had served 14 years in prison for PIRA activities, had "fingered" RUC Constable Nesbitt when the PIRA shot him.

Apparently, Laurence Marley's brother gave evidence against the Shankill butchers (the UVF murder squad) back in the 1970s and so there was probably a desire by the UVF to get back at him.

Comment

- The immediate reactions to the incidents are that it was something approaching a disaster for nationalist-RUC relations.
- Sinn Fein and the PIRA have had the biggest propaganda coup since the 1981 hunger strike.
- It was a set back for the Agreement in that it showed that the RUC are not subject to control through the process.
- The SDLP have suffered as they were not seen to be doing anything to help.
- It will damage Dr. Joe Hendron's chances in the forthcoming Westminster elections while at the same time enhancing Gerry Adams' chances.

However, the PIRA may not have gained as much as they hoped from the incidents. While the nationalist population of West/North Belfast were infuriated with what they saw as police

vindictiveness, the PIRA were seen to be obviously manipulating the situation to their own ends. Furthermore, the outbreak of violence, the hijackings, the bomb scares, would not be considered favourably by the majority of the local inhabitants (most of the incidents occurred in nationalist territory).

Many nationalists will be looking at the upcoming loyalist protests as a test of not only the efficacy of the new Public Order but RUC willingness to contain loyalists demonstrations and to protect nationalists from outbreaks of sectarian violence.



Liam Canniffe
10 April 1987

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