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Meeting with Brid Rodgers (SDLP)

12 May, 1987

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I met Brid Rodgers in Portadown on 12 May. She was accompanied there by Fr. Paddy Doyle one of the Jesuits who has a house just off Gervahy Road in Churchill Park, a lower income housing area in Portadown. During our conversation, they spoke about the problems for the nationalist community in Portadown during the past year and their fears that the loyalist parades in Portadown during the 12 July period would produce further confrontation between the two communities. The following are some of the points they made:

- The intimidation of Catholics in the loyalist dominated council estates which had gone on all through the summer and autumn of 1986 has virtually stopped. Mrs. Rodgers pointed out that a number of individuals who are known members of the Ulster Clubs are charged with some of these attacks and the police action has had a quietening effect on the others.
- Some disturbances initiated by the PIRA had taken place in Portadown after the Loughgall incident but the town was much quieter than Lurgan. The PIRA are not very strong in the town and are therefore unable to sustain prolonged protest. While questions are asked in the nationalist community as to the necessity for so many deaths, and the apparent use of excessive force by the RUC/SAS, people nevertheless accept that the PIRA have nobody to blame but themselves.
- The Easter loyalist parades passed off very quietly and the Apprentice Boys took a route through Protestant areas in their procession to the church. Unlike the year before, no one tried to go down Obins Street or Gervahy Road and the nationalists in the town were very pleased with the new situation. Mrs. Rodgers believes that part of the reason

why, unlike Easter Sunday 1986, there was no attempt to go along Gervahy Road, was because relations between Alan Wright, the local Chairman of the Ulster Clubs, and Ian Paisley, who led last year's "illegal parade", have turned sour and therefore whatever plan they had fell through.

12 July Portadown Parades

- They are very concerned that the RUC will allow the Orange Order through Obins Street again this year. Last year they said the reason given (but not accepted) was that they could better control the situation if they allowed the parade to go through the nationalist Obins Street. By doing so, the RUC argued, most of the loyalists would be satisfied and therefore cause no trouble. The police argued that if the parade was diverted to another route or banned it would have possibly caused a riot given the hatred that was pent up in the unionist community due to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Both Mrs. Rodgers and Fr. Doyle are fearful that the police will use the same argument again this year. Mrs. Rodgers was concerned that Fr. Doyle's colleague, Fr. Brian Lennon S.J., might unwittingly allow the RUC off the hook through the activities of his "Faith and Justice Group", . This group, which Fr. Lennon has set up in Portadown as a pan nationalist organisation to monitor and deal with issues in the nationalist community, have said they would organise a protest of their own if the Orange Parade is permitted into nationalist areas in the town. Mrs. Rodgers is convinced that a similar threat from a group led by Fr. Lennon last year allowed the RUC to permit the Orange parade through Obins Street. The RUC, she said, would simply trade one off against the other, opting for a damage limitation exercise. The problem with the Faith and Justice Group is that they try to involve all nationalists including the PIRA in their plans. The SDLP of course, have refused to meet with them when the Provisional IRA are present.

- Mrs. Rodgers informed me when we were alone that she and the SDLP councillor for Portadown, Ignatius Fox, intended to meet with the local RUC Commander next week to put their opposition forcefully to loyalist parades in nationalist areas. We agreed that she would be in touch with us again after her meeting with the RUC, with a view to raising the matter through the Secretariat should it remain unresolved.
- After leaving Fr. Doyle we toured Lurgan and saw the Kilwilkee estate where the PIRA have been rioting since the Marley funeral and have been particularly active since Loughgall last Friday. All of the entrances to the estate were closed off by burned-out vehicles or locked railway crossing gates. The rioting, confined to the nationalist areas, does not affect loyalists and so the RUC have not intervened. Brid Rodgers and her husband were lucky to escape injury there last Friday night when their car was attacked by hooded PIRA rioters. They managed to escape but not before a brick was thrown through the rear window injuring a woman passenger in the back seat. Brid Rodgers believes they did not know who she was at the time. They were apparently just burning any vehicle they could lay their hands on.


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