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Secretary of State's Private Office (B)  
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cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B  
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Mr McCusker  
Mr Smyth - B  
Mr Corbett  
Mr McVeigh



Mr Watkins - B

LADY MAYHEW'S DINNER WITH THE CLERGY - MONDAY 11 NOVEMBER 1996

On Monday 11 November Lady Mayhew hosted a second dinner for the clergy at Hillsborough Castle (guest list attached). You were kind enough to attend again, together with Allen McVeigh. The following is a record of the discussion, which began with Lady Mayhew inviting each of the guests to introduce themselves and sum up the current situation in their areas.

Bellaghy

2. The Reverend [REDACTED] began by describing the sectarian conflict which his community had suffered over the summer - trouble had started on 11 July as a result of the situation in Portadown. Republican gangs had thrown stones at Protestant targets, such as the Manse and the local primary school and, since then, there had been many instances of intimidation, as a result of which, eight families had left the village. The tension, he said, had been frighteningly high during the period - on one night he had faced, in his garden, a 50-strong masked mob armed with sticks. He claimed that the RUC had been nowhere to be seen for much of this time and he had felt as though no one really cared what happened. When the police had eventually arrived he had been alarmed by the

fact that they seemed to be stretched to breaking point. As events had developed over the summer, the community had begun to feel increasingly vulnerable and this had given rise to certain perceptions which have led to the polarisation of the communities and to activities such as boycotting (although he thought that this had now largely stopped). He added that he and the local Parish Priest and Church of Ireland Minister were getting together to try to come to a better understanding of how to deal with the situation, and how to better relate to their communities.

#### Whitehouse/Greencastle

3. Father [REDACTED] (Whitehouse/Greencastle) spoke next about how vulnerable the Roman Catholic community was feeling in his area. Last year, a bomb had been left outside the church and, since then, its associated buildings had suffered four attacks in twelve months. Even before Drumcree (in June) his house had been petrol-bombed and damaged to the extent that it cost £120k to repair it; the school in Greencastle had previously been completely destroyed, (indeed, a few days after this dinner both the school and his church were attacked again).

4. Father [REDACTED] said that during the Drumcree period Catholics in his area had found themselves barricaded in by mobs on the road. The RUC, he said, had asked him to come to help people who were being intimidated but, unable to get past the mobs, he said it was the first time in his life he had so deeply feared for his personal safety and for the safety of those around him. He had been struck by the sheer evil he had witnessed and also by the unwillingness of the police to help to do anything about it.

5. Fr [REDACTED] was extremely critical of the RUC saying that, when his school had been burnt down, the police had not even bothered to come and tell him about it even though the RUC station is just across the road from the church. He said he had often been harassed by the police - on one occasion he had been stopped by a police officer aggressively demanding to know whether or not he had a dog licence. Fr [REDACTED] who, it appears, has a reputation for



reporting incidents of RUC harassment, duly reported the incident and was, apparently, told by a Chief Inspector that the RUC officer in question had mistaken him for a loyalist from Rathcoole. Fr [REDACTED] found this a rather bizarre (if subsequently amusing) excuse.

#### Dunloy

6. [REDACTED] had only been in post since May and had, he said, had a baptism of fire. The only Protestant buildings in Dunloy were the Presbyterian Church, the Church Hall, the Manse, and the Orange Hall. There had apparently been violent instances in the past due to parades but these had been particularly troublesome this Summer. There were, traditionally, three parades through the village and to get to the Church these had to go up the Main Street, and involved a major police operation. This year only two had been allowed through - the third had been stopped by the RUC because more Orangemen had turned up than they had bargained for. This caused a lot of tension and had, he felt, precipitated the intimidation of Roman Catholics going to Church in the Harryville area. The Reverend [REDACTED] was, however, hopeful that something good could come out of the Summer. He had heard that another parade through the village was being planned and he felt that, if that one was allowed to go through, then there was a possibility that the parades might stop altogether.

#### Ballynafeigh/Ormeau

7. Father [REDACTED] went on to say how his area had remained relatively untouched by the events of the Summer and there were, he said, actually very good relations, both inter-Church and inter-community. There had been a few incidents during the Summer but these had been related primarily to events below the bridge. There was, however, some fear that if the situation was not sorted out then, inevitably, trouble would begin to move above the bridge. Fr [REDACTED] said that he had only had experience of three instances of intimidation throughout the whole summer and that all of those had occurred on the Twelfth night. His

own Parishoners had, he said, been shocked and deeply troubled by what had happened at Drumcree. Moderate people were now beginning to say that they would vote for Sinn Fein and he himself had been saddened and disappointed by the whole situation as previously his area had largely been, he felt, a model of how Protestants and Roman Catholics could live together.

8. He, too, raised the importance of the policing issue. People had been disappointed by the way in which the police had behaved at Drumcree and, more locally, by the police's stance on the painting of kerb stones - the community felt that the RUC had stood by and watched the Orangemen paint the kerb stones red, white and blue and had simply let them get on with it. When Father [REDACTED] approached the RUC about the issue they had argued that if they had tried to stop the perpetrators then there would have been serious violence in the side streets along the Ormeau Road. This troubled Father [REDACTED] greatly because of the inherent suggestion that if a mob shouted loud enough then it would automatically win the day.

#### North Belfast

9. The Reverend [REDACTED] remarked how very different her parish was to Father [REDACTED]. In her area, the two communities had very little to do with each other, and there were two very serious flashpoints - at the Mountcollyer/Limestone Road interface and at Duncairn Gardens. She said that both communities were very fearful and both had been very badly hurt.

10. The Reverend [REDACTED] felt that the Protestant community was particularly frightened because it perceived that it had lost ground and that the peace process had been Nationalist-led. She, along with a number of others, were working very hard in her area to try to teach the Protestant community that they had, in fact, nothing to fear but she had been shocked by what the community had done to itself during Drumcree. She felt that those who had "set up" the Drumcree scenario had known exactly what they were releasing. Her approach to the post-Drumcree fear in her community was that she and Father [REDACTED] the local Parish Priest, were trying to speak



with one voice. This included only doing interviews for the press if both of them were present.

11. The Reverend [REDACTED] said that, although there was a good clergy fellowship on the Lower Antrim Road, she felt strongly that it was wrong to try to push people into cross-community activities. She was struck by the many ironies in cross-community work, giving as an example the fact that she had an excellent relationship with the Roman Catholics in her area but had many poor relations with other Protestant churches around her, some of which had refused to come into the Clergy Fellowship. Another dimension was that she and [REDACTED], both ordained women, had not even been invited to join the Clergy Fellowship on the York Road.

#### Newtownabbey

12. The Reverend [REDACTED] then spoke about how he found the situation in his area in Newtownabbey (his parish and that of Father [REDACTED] had about a 75% overlap). The Reverend [REDACTED] particular area, he felt, was marked by complacency rather than aggression. There were no large estates where paramilitary presence existed. His community had, however, experienced some instances of intimidation - families had sought sanctuary at his church - and he commented on how terrible it was to witness the sheer evil of mob rule and the fear in which it resulted.

#### Ardoyne

13. Father [REDACTED] spoke of his experiences in the Ardoyne area. He said how his community had witnessed its share of rioting in response to the political talks process and how it was very critical of the British Government for not having taken advantage of the ceasefire situation. He found it interesting to note that the local community seemed to be drawing some hope from the words of people like David Ervine and other members of the loyalist parties, though they still distrusted the main Unionist parties and he put this down to the sense of a shared background of social disadvantage.



14. Fr [REDACTED] said that his community occasionally had to suffer firebombs, stoning incidents and so on, but he felt that, after Drumcree, there had been general disgust at the trouble which had broken out in Ardoyne - a lot of young people had become involved and, surprisingly, a large number of young girls. Drumcree had been a turning point and although he felt that things had been moving forward previously, he thought that it would now be difficult for the RUC, in particular, to regain the lost ground - indeed, he felt that they never would. He had witnessed the anguish of women in the community who felt that if the police had initially permitted the march through at Drumcree then they and their communities would never have had to suffer everything that had happened subsequently.

15. Fr [REDACTED] went on to comment on the extreme polarisation he had witnessed in the community - Nationalists were now questioning if there had ever been anything other than token acceptance of Catholics in the Province. On a note of optimism, he added that at least the clergy in his area had built up good relations because they had already started a joint group after the Shankill bombing.

#### Coalisland

16. The Reverend [REDACTED] went on to describe the difficulties of ministering to his parish in Coalisland, where there was a reducing Protestant minority, and in the Stewartstown area, which was largely mixed. The Reverend [REDACTED] said that, although until Drumcree he had believed that the reduction of the Protestant population in Coalisland, had been the result of economic factors, he now felt that there could perhaps have been a campaign of "ethnic cleansing". Community relations had been excellent in the area, and everyone had worked very hard at improving them; however, all of that work had been destroyed and it would, he thought, be very difficult to resurrect. He felt that, in Coalisland, he was being used as "the token Protestant" in order to access cross-community grants and that he was being "trailed out" to show how ecumenical Coalisland was. He felt bitterly betrayed by people he had worked with and said that his community thought that there was no way forward except through taking a stance at another

Drumcree. He had found the Nationalists uncompromising and said that, even though he had persuaded the Orange Order to re-route a march through the town, there had still been no compromise and Nationalist pickets had refused to let it pass.

#### Fermanagh

17. The Reverend [REDACTED] on the Upper Erne circuit, which includes Brookeborough, Lisnaskea, Newtownbutler, and a small area around Rosslea) identified with much of what [REDACTED] had said. He said that, in his area, Drumcree had affected Newtownbutler most severely, where there was a very small Protestant community and a majority Nationalist community. The latter had vented its anger after Drumcree by blocking roads to Protestants coming back from parades in Kesh and Newtownbutler on 12 July. He said that many of the Protestants in his community had abhorred what had happened at Drumcree, and that the aftermath had destroyed community relations in Newtownbutler. Boycotting has wrecked businesses and the Protestant community were feeling intimidated and very frightened by what they perceived as their continual loss of ground.

#### South Belfast

18. The Reverend [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on the Belfast South circuit) went on to describe the mixture of feelings he was encountering in his relatively affluent parish in South Belfast. There, he said, everyone was very "nice" to each other - the predominantly professional and middle-class community did not want to put anything at risk. Indeed, he often found his situation almost humorous when seen within the wider context - as the only thing stopping South Belfast residents from getting up or down their roads was the fact that CableTel were digging them up (he was much taken by the solution proposed by the comedian May McFettridge, who had, apparently, suggested that if CableTel could be persuaded to carry out some work on the Garvaghy Road at an appropriate time of year, then nobody would be able to get up or down the road).



19. On a more serious note, however, the Reverend [REDACTED] felt anguished that 27 years on, we were still sharing the same stories. He was deeply saddened by the fact that the confidence which he had seen growing in the Nationalist community had been destroyed and that there was now an overwhelming sense of fear and alienation. Looking to how we could move on he remarked how all of the stories he had heard around the table had been church centred, and he asked if those present felt that they were supported by their church structure, or if there was more they could be asking of their church leaders.

#### Discussion

20. Mr Watkins said at this point how striking he had found what those around the table had had to say. He welcomed the broad observations of two communities obviously in great fear and said how saddened he was by the fact that, in four days, the work of a great many people had been undone. Father [REDACTED] stressed that he was tired of hearing the myth which was being put abroad that parades were non-bigoted, innocent and unthreatening expressions of cultural identity. That definition, he said, stuck in his throat. He recalled the many times that abuse had been hurled at him as parades and bands passed his house. Parades, he said, were not seen as an inoffensive expression of culture but were, rather, designed to keep Catholics in their second-class place and that had been his experience since a child. [REDACTED] could not, however, understand how this could be the case in places where Catholics had as much as a 99% majority.

21. The Reverend [REDACTED] said that he felt that it was wrong to try to demonise the Orange Order. Although he was aware that the organisation had done things which were totally anathema to his beliefs there had, he said, been no problem with parades in Bellaghy until the IRA had called a ceasefire. He said that that was when Residents' Groups had suddenly emerged, fronted by people connected with Sinn Fein. The perception was that Sinn Fein/IRA were out to stop the decent, hardworking local people in Bellaghy from marching



to their church. He went on to say that the political force behind such blocking of parades could hardly be denied when one took account of the fact that people like Francie Molloy and Brendan McKenna were prepared to travel to areas of the Province which were well outside their own areas in order to support the blocking of parades. The Reverend [REDACTED] pointed out that the other side of this could be seen when particular bands which had a reputation for trouble-making went to march in different areas across the Province. He gave the example of the Roden Street Defenders Band turning up to march at Ballycastle.

#### The Challenge to Christians

22. Father [REDACTED] then said that, in his experience, the problem in Northern Ireland came down to a lack of common Christianity. The Reverend [REDACTED] agreed, saying that he had been brought up in a staunchly Loyalist background - his father had served time for Loyalist paramilitary activity and he had not had a Christian upbringing. What had changed everything for him was the fact that he had become a Christian. He felt that the clergy carried a tremendous responsibility and that they had miserably failed even the moderates on both sides. He felt that people's actions would only change when their hearts changed and he added that, although the churches could play a part in politics, they needed to lead the way from a Christian perspective and let others see how their belief in God made a difference to their lives.

[REDACTED] agreed with this perspective also, adding that people needed to know that they mattered to God. She wondered what had happened to produce a society in which people could only achieve a sense of their identity through painting kerbstones. Father [REDACTED] said that part of the problem was that people who were involved in violence were so closed that it was difficult to know how to persuade them to be open to the word of God.

23. The Reverend [REDACTED] commented on the positive outcome of all that had happened over the summer in that it had made people face reality. He asked, however, what could be done about it. The Reverend [REDACTED] suggested that it was difficult for his community to do anything about it since they felt under such threat. The

Reverend [REDACTED] asked if such challenges were, in fact, a test of the leadership of the clergy in the community but the Reverend [REDACTED] asked how long would he have a community if he tried to go too fast for them? He suggested that it was possible to go so far ahead of your community that, when you came to a crossroads, they lost sight of you and ended up taking a different road from yours. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] suggested that the clergy should work together, even if their communities did not feel that they could join them - she felt that if the clergy were not working together, it would never be possible for the people to do so. She added that she had felt bereft by many of the scenes which she had witnessed over the summer and was distressed that no-one was articulating what she felt.

24. The Reverend [REDACTED] was bitter that the situation had not been resolved after last year, and the question exercising his mind was "how many dead Protestant bodies would have been acceptable to the Nationalist community on the Garvaghy Road?" Father [REDACTED] said that the Catholic perception was that the Orange Order had forced the RUC's hand and that the Orange card was still being played - it was still a Protestant land for a Protestant people, and the Nationalists had been beaten into the ground and swept aside in a massive show of strength.

25. The Reverend [REDACTED] commented that it seemed to him, at least in the Dunloy and Bellaghy situations, that the Nationalists had accepted, with the IRA ceasefire, that they were going to be unable to get what they wanted through the bomb and the bullet. Now, however, they were using the Residents' Associations to set quiet, hard-working Orangemen against the police. The perception amongst the Protestant community in areas like Dunloy and Bellaghy was that, because they were the lesser of the two evils there, they were prevented from marching. In Drumcree, that same law had been upheld - in the end, the Nationalists had been perceived as the lesser threat by the RUC. The RUC were, evidently, caught between a rock and a hard place.

26. The Reverend [REDACTED] claimed that the RUC had been told that if the Orangemen tried to force the march down the Garvaghy Road



they were to discharge all their plastic bullets, fire their live rounds into the air, and then retreat behind the Army. He went on to say that, if an Orangeman had been shot, Northern Ireland would have become ungovernable. He said that part of the problem was that the troubles had provided respectability and power for corner boys who would certainly never be reached by the clergy.

27. The Reverend [REDACTED] said that this was true, up to a point, but that one had to remember that the paramilitaries belonged to the society from which they came and that they cared about that society more than the clergy or the police. The Reverend [REDACTED] did not doubt that there was a mountain of goodwill, and that people did want peace, but he suggested that, if there were to be peace tomorrow, the corner boys who had now become well connected, would lose their power and would, therefore, be reluctant to give up the fight.

28. Father [REDACTED] concluded by saying that the clergy often wanted to be more broadminded, but had to be careful not to let their broadmindedness force other issues to blow up in their faces. He added that economic development was also an important factor in the struggle for peace and that if there was, for example, greater employment, there would be less likelihood of rioting in the streets. Mr Watkins agreed with this but pointed out that, sadly, the majority of people who had been at Drumcree probably had jobs and this, he said, had weakened the argument for concentrating on improving economic development as a means to peace.

#### Comment

29. Lady Mayhew found this a very interesting occasion, particularly for getting a read out on how communities in some of the Province's flashpoints had reacted to the events of the summer. Those present were very frank about their views and those of their communities.

30. The increasingly hostile attitude of both communities to the RUC was a recurring theme and might be something which Police Division would find worth pursuing further with the clergy. It is notable how openly people will speak on informal occasions such as this - there might, perhaps, be merit in inviting senior police officers to meet with a selection of clergy to hear, at first hand, their views on policing in their communities.

(SIGNED)

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