

was also some worrying talk about terrorist elements saying that they would ensure the parades went through.

Detail

3. The Minister began by welcoming the delegation and assuring them that the office was not inhabited by ogres. The Minister said that he wished to support the history and culture of the people of Northern Ireland in all its diversity. He knew from reading about the Orange Lodge that it was committed to the Crown and the lawful authority invested in the Crown. He knew also that the Order claimed not to be intransigent but neither would it be bullied. The Minister said that he very much applauded the sentiment and the Order had every right to expect support. His fear was that with the delicately balanced security situation and finely poised political development, PIRA/Sinn Fein were looking for an excuse to draw the Orangemen and the RUC into conflict.

4. Mr Salters said that he was grateful for the Minister's views but he was not sure what he could do to help. His rank and file felt that the Orangemen were always backing off. Mr Salters colleagues chipped in by saying that loyalists felt that the only thing that would be acceptable to the Republicans was for them to stay at home. There was also a difficulty with 'certain elements' who had indicated that they would ensure that marches were put through the Ormeau Road although the Orangemen had completely rejected any such overtures. The Orange Leadership was looking over its shoulder at those who wished to make a grand political stand at the marches. The fear was that the city was ringed with Republican estates and, once main roads were given up, the Orangemen would not be able to go anywhere. The Orangemen said they had huge respect for the ordinary people of the Ormeau Road who are not bothered about their parade; they had tried to talk to the Ormeau community but it was not local people but hardline republicans who were coming forward as representatives of the area. Mr Salters had received a letter from Gerard Rice but would not talk to him.

5. Responding to a question about whether or not there was any benefits in talking to mediation groups, Mr Salters said that the general feeling was that these were good people but a bit naive. As for the RUC's performance, Mr Salters believed that it had been very good until last year at which stage the new ACC had told him that the time for parades "had had its day".

6. Mr Steele suggested that the Orangemen would wish to take the high moral ground. If they were going to have a compromise could they not get that in first and publicise it. One of the Orange representatives said that they had already come to many compromises ie they had cut parades to the bone and they no longer returned via the Ormeau Road. Orange parades had been reduced from 7 to 3 and although they were only talking about 400 yards it was the thin end of the wedge. Mr Steele asked if some sort of compromise route could be found ie that they might be allowed over the bridge but then turned left down University Avenue. The Orange representative said that the problem was that next year the nationalists would say that that street had become a nationalist street.

7. When Sir John and Mr Steele suggested that the Royal Black Preceptory had gained great kudos by re-routing themselves and publicising it. The Orangemen said that gaining kudos might have been the perception in Stormont but it was certainly not the perception among the leaderships own members and those who had climbed down would probably lose their position.

8. Quite worryingly the Orangemen described an inter-institution discussion last week at which the Apprentice Boys had asked for the physical support of the other institutions on Easter Tuesday. The Orangemen said they had rejected this call as they had enough problems with their own parades but did not rule out individual members going.

9. The final couple of points worth recording are that the Orangemen said that they had an enormous amount of time for Ronnie Flannagan and hoped that his skills as DCC Ops would help the situation. When the direct question was put to the Orangemen as to

what they would do if the march was re-routed; they said that they might accept that in some cases (they do not like trouble at a church service but 12 July was different).

Signed

PAUL A JOHNSTON
PS/Sir John Wheeler

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