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B. Copy
Bj. Come on ..

From: Mary Butcher
Secretary of State's Private Office
4 October 1996

65/10

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Carvill
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr McCusker
Mr ~~Canavan~~
Mr Corbett

S.
28
10.

9/10 S. 9
We agreed to come

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

LADY MAYHEW'S MEETING WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS IN PORTADOWN - TUESDAY on
1 OCTOBER 1996

23.
2
8/15

Lady Mayhew visited Portadown on Tuesday 1 October to meet community leaders from the Killicomaine/Garvaghy Road areas of the town. A list of those who attended is attached.

Now representative.

Background

2. Lady Mayhew had asked to meet Diane Robb (Acting Principal Community Services Officer with Craigavon Borough Council) to discuss community relations in the Craigavon area and follow up to previous meetings which Lady Mayhew had had with community activists from the area. Miss Robb suggested that it would be interesting and useful if Lady Mayhew were to meet some local community leaders who were trying to pick up the pieces after Drumcree, including some of those who were currently working with Mediation Network. Lady Mayhew agreed and the following is a record of the discussion which took place.

Bye Portadown
(management split).

Community mood after the summer

3. Lady Mayhew began by asking how people were feeling in the Portadown community after the traumatic events of the summer. Mr McCrystal said that it was notable that the projects which had

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survived were those which had been concentrating on building relationships between the two communities. Those which had been purely economic development projects, without any element of relationship-building, had collapsed. He said that, although it was essential to work at a level where there was a chance of creating jobs, it was perilous to ignore the importance of building personal relationships. He concluded that it would be useful if community development funders were to demand that a project should demonstrably incorporate solid community relations groundwork in its development plan before it would receive funding. He firmly believed that community development work done in isolation from community relations work was purely cosmetic. *Chicago is important*

4. Mr McCrystal added that there was a need for community relations workers to get together to look at new ways to go forward and it was clear that they would have to look beyond recognised models of practice. *She should facilitate - DG, etc. ?*

5. Anna Fowler went on to paint a very bleak picture of the current state of play on the Garvaghy Road. She said that they had been finding it very difficult even to get people to come to the community centre - and that was only from within their own community. She spoke of the overwhelming sense that people were simply not interested in anything. By way of illustration, she added that, compared to previous years, people had been very slow to come back to courses being run at the community centre - although these were now fully subscribed, they had had to work very conscientiously at wooing the community to return. People, she said, had become unbearably disheartened - issues such as education/art etc had no bearing on a future for which they saw no hope.

6. Mr Holloway endorsed this assessment of the current situation, and said that much of what Ms Fowler described was echoed in the Protestant community. He added that there was a sense of powerlessness apparent throughout the community. The worsening political situation had meant that those involved in community

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relations work felt that no matter what they did they would never effect change. This feeling also rebounded on those who were trying to work on community development - the sense of despair was overriding any sense of responsibility which the community had had for itself. The gut human reaction to the situation at Drumcree was "it's pointless and I'm powerless". Community workers had seen how so-called political leaders were so easily able to make disastrous things happen which had completely eroded years of hard work and they were feeling very disillusioned.

The RUC's decision

7. Anna Fowler said that a grave error had been made by the RUC in refusing to allow the march to go down the Garvaghy Road - those who lived there had expected the parade to be allowed to go ahead. The Garvaghy Road residents had, however, admired the police for standing up to the Orange Men (there had been an almost euphoric sense that the RUC were, for once, protecting the rights of the Nationalist community) but when the RUC had reversed the decision and turned so brutally on the Nationalist community who, she said, had effectively made only a token protest, the residents felt disappointed to the point of desperation. Mr Murphy agreed with this viewpoint - the RUC had created the expectation that, for once, the Nationalist community was being treated fairly. Expectations which had been raised then turned into a bitter sense of betrayal when the RUC reversed their decision. Miss Fowler said that it had been a terrifying time to live on the Garvaghy Road. Those who sat in the road to protest when the march went ahead were not, at that point, objecting to the Orange Men but were, rather, registering their disgust at what the RUC had done. Mr Murphy said how alarmed he had been to see in the faces of the young people the same anger and hurt he had seen in 1975 - they were, quite simply, fodder for the paramilitaries.

8. Mr Murphy and Mr Holloway then went on to consider why Portadown seemed to be particularly volatile. They agreed that there seemed to be a deep insecurity and lack of confidence within

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the Protestant community, which possibly made it less flexible there than in other areas. Mr Holloway said how difficult it was to quantify the depth of bitterness, despair, fear and suspicion. The Protestant community had never felt secure in its culture - Protestants had always had a siege mentality because their culture had always seemed to be under threat. They saw the march on the Garvaghy Road as representative of their culture and right and, therefore, when the march was challenged this was interpreted simplistically as an attack on that culture and right. The police hemming them in had caused additional fear and confusion because, traditionally, the RUC had been seen as "their boys".

9. Anna Fowler registered her frustration at the fact that the march down the Garvaghy Road was being portrayed as a recent problem. She said that in all of the media coverage it had never been revealed that the women of the area had been trying to resolve the situation for 12 years. These women (and, she said, there had never previously been any Sinn Fein involvement) had wanted to come to some sort of agreement because they were tired of being blocked into their homes every year by RUC landrovers. The Orange Order had, however, refused to respond to letters and correspondence sent every year requesting a meeting.

10. Mr McCrystal felt that the tragic irony was that each side was actually seeking acknowledgement and respect from the other. People were, however, in a state of confusion - they were unsure of their own position, and this made it difficult to acknowledge the position of the other side.

The Churches

11. Mr Holloway suggested that the answer might be a spiritual one (although he conceded that not everyone would embrace that viewpoint). He added, however, that he had made considerable efforts to get the clergy together to discuss relevant social issues but had found his attempts a profoundly disillusioning experience. The churches, he said, seemed to fear their own people, although

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This was especially a Protestant problem because Protestant clergy had almost no power. For example, the Minister at Seagoe Church of Ireland had been involved in building community relations but even he had considerable worries and fear that the pace was too fast for the congregation.

12. Mr Holloway's personal opinion was that if someone had accepted the role of interpreting the word of God then he should be prepared to 'martyr' himself to some extent. He accepted, however, that it might be more generally considered unreasonable for individual clergy to be expected to stand up alone. He concluded, though, that the united voice of the clergy in Portadown would be very powerful.

13. Lady Mayhew suggested trying to support the clergy in a wider sphere by trying to get the churches to come together at a higher level so that individual Ministers would have a reference point. Mr McCrystal felt that each church should draft a community relations policy as a shield for the clergy so that it could be incorporated as part of their "job description".

Grass roots involvement in a solution

14. Anna Fowler went on to say how important it was to do everything possible to bring on board the 'hard-liners' at grass roots level in the community and to give them a voice in the community relations field. She felt very strongly that they, not the political leaders, were the vehicle through which peace would be delivered. Mr McCrystal agreed and said that Drumcree had raised the question of whether community relations work had been affecting the right people.

15. Mr Murphy felt that Government needed to intervene and provide realistic structures and resources - people should have to demonstrate their commitment to community relations or suffer sanctions in their economic development work. Schools, for example, should not be allowed to opt out of the Cross Community Contact

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Scheme - it had to be accepted that there would be resistance from some staff and boards of governors. He felt that Government needed to realise the necessity for a new vision - the last 30 years had been seen not to work.

*Shall we
chase?*

16. At this point Mr McCrystal raised a point which had obviously been a source of some annoyance to community workers. He said that, although the Council Community Relations Officers were kept informed by CRC, other community relations organisation, even those which were core-funded, did not even receive the information packs which were distributed to CROs by CRC. Mr Holloway said that he was currently pursuing this issue with CRC and added that another source of concern was that community relations organisations felt that they had no forum for contributing to the work done by the Council CROs and this often led to a sense of isolation.

Support network for

*Sec. C.R.O. support groups
Sh. in dev't have a group
internal structure*

*core-funded bodies: -
networking, information*

The Way Ahead

17. Lady Mayhew went on to ask what was being done to try to prevent "Drumcree 1997". All of those present stressed vehemently how essential it was that some sort of local solution to the marching problem at Garvaghy Road was found very quickly. They felt that after Christmas it would again begin to escalate into a bigger issue. Mr McCrystal pointed out that short to medium term solutions needed to be worked on by those in the mediation/negotiation fields but he stressed how difficult it was to work out a strategy when the community still could not get past talking about the rights and wrongs of the situation.

*Sharing
models
of best
practice*

18. Anna Fowler said that the Garvaghy Road residents had made it clear already that they were not going to talk to anyone - although, she said, they did not object to the pageantry of the march, it was the triumphalism which was the sticking point for them. It was agreed by those present that if a locally - negotiated settlement could not be reached before Christmas the situation would be very bleak. They all agreed that the outcome of the North report would be known too late.

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19. Lady Mayhew asked if it would be feasible to get local Protestants to help the Orange Order overcome its fears.

Mr Holloway thought that this would not be possible in the short term, and certainly not fast enough to prevent "Drumcree 1997". He was hopeful though that, in time, the conflict would be approached rationally. The two sides needed help to see that they could both actually win something - it was not just a matter of losing to the other side. He stressed again, however, the need to keep the problem at a local level - he thought that there were individuals and groups with power who did not approve of the community reaching a local decision (and added that, at a wider level, there was no way the DUP would accept an agreement which has been brokered by the UUP).

20. Mr Holloway then went on to say how he believed strongly that more progress would be made, and a greater understanding of the problems achieved, if those in power listened to community activists and volunteers on the ground rather than to existing accepted public sources of understanding, such as the political parties. This was especially relevant in terms of how decisions were perceived on the ground - there were different perceptions of reality amongst communities and decision-making must take account of these.

21. Mr McCrystal agreed strongly with this and said that the prime example was the RUC's reversal of the decision to stop the Orange Men walking down the Garvaghy Road. Although the Chief Constable may have come to believe that his original decision was wrong, he should have stuck to it! (and community activists would have thus advised him). The perception amongst the community was that the forces of law and order in a democratic European country had been seen to collapse and the Government could no longer claim the right to rule in a situation where it is perceived to have no control over law and order.

22. Lady Mayhew asked again what needed to be done to help solve the problem. Mr Holloway suggested that those mediating needed

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access to people nationally and locally who could take on board what they were trying to discuss and help them effect change. He said that many thought that the NIO was a faceless bureaucracy - organisations on the ground had no idea how the NIO related to the community, how it made contact or what its strategy was in respect of community relations. He said that community activists needed access to channels of communication - people, both at official and Ministerial level, who would take community leaders seriously. He said that, although it would be encouraging to be able to come and meet such people, even access to them should it be required would be an advantage. He said it was important that community activists should be given an opportunity to build relationships with officials so that when a crisis was imminent they could make contact quickly and be heeded.

1/10/65 Lady Mayhew

23. In response to this Lady Mayhew said she would report back the concerns of those present who said that, if it was feasible, they would be grateful for an opportunity to have an informal meeting with Ministers/senior officials and, if possible, a senior RUC Officer (I should be grateful for advice/comments from copy addressees about taking this forward).

24. After some discussion about how she could help, Lady Mayhew agreed to consider hosting a gathering of community activists from Portadown along the lines of similar events she had had before. Those present felt that this would provide a welcome opportunity for those invited to deepen existing relationships and, perhaps, forge new ones. David Holloway also told Lady Mayhew about a "Think-tank" group which he has been facilitating for about 10 months. The members of the group (about 18 in total) were from both sides of the community and they came together in a safe environment to discuss, freely and openly, controversial issues. Lady Mayhew agreed to consider meeting the group.

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Conclusion

25. This was a very interesting and informative meeting - it was obvious that the over-riding concern of those present was that a solution to the marching problem should be found in time to prevent a repeat of the crisis next year. They were clearly disillusioned with the current political leadership and desperate for a direct line to government.

Follow-up

26. Following this meeting, I telephoned Joe Campbell to ask about Mediation Network's involvement with this group. He said that he and Brendan McAllister recognised them as key community activists in the Portadown area who were not politically affiliated. He regarded them as important because they were close to the ground, cross-community, and had established a lot of trust both with each other and within their communities. They had, he said, a vision and heart for the work they were doing and were very committed. Mediation Network had come alongside them to train them in the hope that they would be able to take on some of the mediation and negotiation work required in this area. Mr Campbell felt that it would, indeed, be useful for the NIO to get to know these people in a "partnership/collaborative" way, which would hopefully support and affirm their work (Mediation Network has also set up individual mediation groups locally in Derry and in North, West and South Belfast).

Signed

MARY BUTCHER
PS/Lady Mayhew

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MEETING WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS IN PORTADOWN

Tuesday 1 October 1996

Attending

Lady Mayhew

Diane Robb

Acting Principal Community Services Officer, Craigavon Borough Council

Anna Fowler

Co-ordinator Ashgrove Community Centre, Garvaghy Road; resident of Churchill Park

Martin McCrystal

Community Relations co-ordinator employed by Project Portadown (a cross-community ACE scheme)

David Holloway

Community Relations Officer with Project Portadown

! Area based.

John Murphy

Youth worker (SELB), St Mary's Youth Club, Obin Street

Mary Butcher

PS/Lady Mayhew

St. Mary's block could well be "Grace's" local park.

Brendan McCrystal

v.l.a.c.r.o.

3 stage solution: - local dialogue (pyramid effect).

legislation.

brief (operational).

Garvaghy Road residence

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