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From: J A DANIELL
DIRECTOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE
13 January 1996

*To: [unclear]
Mrs. Ritchie*

Must also see this but I think it would be of interest on your side and perhaps you could have a readable file for it.

29/11

1. cc for the Cusker

[Redacted signature]

2. L. Harvey

Julie P. [unclear]

[unclear] 17.1

- cc PS/PUS (B&L)
- PS/Sir David Fell
- Mr Steele
- Mr Watkins
- Mr Leach
- Mr Wood (B&L)
- Mrs Collins
- Mr Priestly
- Mr Perry
- Dr Power
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr May
- Mr Buchanan

MR MARSH

ASST/ SEC
14 JAN 1996
C.C.R.U.

JOYRIDING IN WEST BELFAST

This note records my conversation with Breidge Gadd and Oliver Brannigan (Deputy Chief Probation Officer) about the meeting on joyriding held in Poleglass on 8 January. Mr Brannigan took part in a panel discussion at the meeting. I have also had the benefit of hearing the outcome of Richard Buchanan's discussions on the subject with Dave Wall (NIACRO) and this morning a meeting which Richard and I had with two representatives from the HALT project one of whom was also present at the meeting. (HALT is an MBW funded scheme, sponsored by the NIO, which involves the development of educational packages for schools and youth clubs in West Belfast, aimed at preventing car theft).

2. From all the descriptions of what went on, it seems that Press reporting of the meeting was broadly accurate, including the estimate of around 1,000 very angry people being there. A number of agencies, including PBNI, the Housing Executive, the Youth Service and MBW, (but not the RUC), had been invited to send representatives along with Joe Hendron and Sinn Fein and SDLP councillors. It was apparently announced at the meeting, to hoots of derision, that DOE had declined to attend on the ground that they did not work after 5.00 pm.

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3. It appears that the meeting was run by hard-line elements in the Republican movement, which were exploiting very real public alarm and pressure for action in response to the upsurge in joyriding over the Christmas period. Geraldine Taylor, the chair, was known for her uncompromising brand of republicanism. According to Mr Brannigan, those organising the event had intended that the outcome should be a series of motions setting up local "policing" committees, across West Belfast, which would organise vigilante patrols, punishments, expulsions etc. In the event, the mood of the meeting was so highly-charged (with demands from the floor for immediate action to tar and feather, expel recalcitrant families etc) that the Chair was unable to bring it to a formal conclusion. Nevertheless, as it broke up, Mr Brannigan noted large numbers of men signing up to participate in vigilante patrols, organised by the ultra hard wing of the Republican movement. Such patrols were to start operating over the weekend.

4. Mr Brannigan said that there was no place at the meeting for reasoned argument. The softer end of the Republican movement, including some significant Sinn Fein figures such as Annie Armstrong (who pleaded against kangaroo counts and summary punishments), were eclipsed. Joe Hendron received a particularly rough ride - he later gave a radio interview stressing that any proposals to resolve the problem had to recognise that the RUC and NIO were unacceptable in West Belfast. It appeared that even the harder Sinn Fein/IRA elements were shocked by the vehemence of demands from the floor that extreme action be taken against anti-social elements.

5. According to Mr Brannigan, a constantly repeated refrain at the meeting was that the RUC were only concerned with anti-subversion, and not with protecting the local community from criminal and anti-social elements. It was said that respectable young people were being apprehended for the most minor of incidents (eg being stopped in the street and

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responding to an ID check by giving a name in Irish) and then attempts made to blackmail them into "touting". Yet joyriders were ignored, or let off with cautions or warnings. There was a perception that more often than not the RUC would not turn up to investigate burglary, taking and driving away, petty crime etc. The police were seen as faceless people in armoured landrovers, concerned only with their "paramilitary function".

6. Mrs Gadd said that (especially before Drumcree) Probation had been making progress with elements of the community in West Belfast, including some on the Republican side, who were beginning to accept that the formal criminal justice system, including the police and the courts, did have a role in certain circumstances. But such people were no longer in a position to exert a moderating influence, having been "shoved aside". The Probation view was that the meeting was something of a watershed. It heralded a complete break between the community in West Belfast and the criminal justice system, which would be replaced by an anarchic and frightening vigilante arrangement, backed by PIRA. It seemed that this was what was wanted by the "man in the street".

7. Mrs Gadd said that her staff were continuing with their efforts to work with the local community and to develop schemes to divert youngsters from anti-social behaviour. But, if the mood evident at the meeting persisted, and was reflected in activity on the ground, Probation might see little option other than to scale down their involvement.

Comment on diversionary schemes:- Probation fund a number of projects, under the auspices of the West Belfast Specified Activity Programme, aimed at persistent and serious offenders (with special emphasis on car crime) who are subject to Probation Orders with an additional requirement imposed by the Court. The aim is to provide drop in and counselling facilities, together with constructive activities at times when offending is most

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common (night time and weekends). Projects include Newstart in the Lower Falls, operated in conjunction with Social Services, Lynx (Twinbrook), funded jointly with Children in Need, and grant-aided schemes run by the West Belfast Parent and Support Group.

Also, there are a range of Probation sponsored projects with a diversionary element run under MBW auspices - under the heading of Crime Prevention Programmes - North and West Belfast. Interestingly, TURAS, a project specifically aimed at providing alternative facilities for potential joyriders, came to an end last year. It was wound up because MBW funding had run out and neither Probation nor NIO had the resources to sustain it in a meaningful way. The TURAS evaluation concluded that it had succeeded in taking some young people off the streets at times when they were most likely to offend; but there was little evidence to suggest that it had succeeded in changing attitudes in the long term.

Dave Wall has expressed the view that diversionary projects, run by statutory agencies or community groups, will be of little value until policing is reformed at the local level. Bill Lockhart (EXTERN), on the other hand, spoke persuasively on the radio, the morning after the Poleglass meeting, extolling the virtues of some well targetted diversionary programmes - he mentioned Youth Support and the Passport programmes, both inter-agency projects run, apparently to good effect, by Extern West in Londonderry. He argued strongly that the educational system had failed the young people concerned - and, contrary to excluding or expelling them, the only way to solve the problem was to find ways of repairing relationships and integrating them into the community.

8. In discussion with Mrs Gadd, I rehearsed the problems faced by the RUC in providing an effective response at community level. Given the terrorist threat, the police could not

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always respond to reported crime in as timely a manner as they would normally wish; when they did respond, it was inevitable that they would be cautious and that armoured landrovers would be in evidence. Moreover, it was all very well the community bemoaning the lack of effectiveness of the RUC, if on the other hand the RUC was not welcome in the areas concerned; there was a "chicken and egg" problem here. But I could not disagree with her that the inability of the RUC to provide a normal community policing service in West Belfast, however understandable the reasons, was central to the problem.

9. Mrs Gadd felt that we were close to the point of no return. If the situation was to be retrieved, she regarded urgent action by the RUC as critical. If the right senior officers were put in charge of the areas concerned (she had one in particular in mind), and they were allowed the flexibility to work effectively with community leaders (I suspect she includes some moderate Sinn Fein elements in this) and with Probation, then it might be possible effectively to counter the punishment beating/expulsion/vigilante culture which was increasingly taking hold. This might involve a greater degree of negotiation and give and take with community based organisations than would normally be the case; but Mrs Gadd also echoed a point made by Bill Lockhart that if the police did succeed in arresting and securing custody for the key people, known to the community as ringleaders of the anti-social elements, then that would be welcomed. (Comment - that also presupposes an effective and speedy response from other parts of the criminal justice system, including the courts and the legal profession).

10. Mrs Gadd was considering making an approach to the Chief Constable to discuss the issues (perhaps on an informal basis). She noted that in places such as Birmingham and Manchester such meetings were commonplace. We left it that we would both think further about the issues and keep in touch.

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Meeting with HALT staff (see para 1 above)

11. The two project workers at HALT (one of whom lives in Twinbrook) this morning confirmed most of what Oliver Brannigan had had to say about the meeting. There was a slight shift in emphasis in that they stressed the extent to which many people spoke up against punishment beatings and were looking for a more acceptable way forward; but it is clear that such sentiments did not result in any structured action, leaving the way clear for the hard line vigilante element. The Twinbrook resident summed up the mood by saying that Christmas was the last straw and people had simply "had enough". Over the weekend men had been out on patrol in Twinbrook, with radio communications, and they were backed up by baseball bat teams (see this morning's Irish News front page). The HALT workers felt that the RUC had been unfairly represented as doing nothing; they had established a "Driving Away Team" at Woodbourne, which before the upsurge in violence had done useful work.

12. I asked the HALT team whether any statutory agency had the credibility to address these issues in the community. They immediately responded by referring to Probation, followed by the Youth Service, while stressing that any response would have to be multi-agency and incorporate the community sector. They noted that in Poleglass, where 49% of the population was 17 or under, youth provision was minimal. It was important that any additional effort and funding put into such areas should address the needs of young people as a whole, not just offenders. They stressed the importance of planning service provision to take account of predictable demographic changes; and they suggested that joyriding was more of a problem in Twinbrook and Poleglass than, say, New Barnsley, because of the configuration of the road system which encouraged fast driving and enabled offenders to move easily from area to area.

13. The workers said that HALT was well received in most of the local schools, although some were loathe to accept that their pupils were at risk of involvement in joyriding (we have had a

similar response from some schools in relation to drugs). After Easter they hoped to extend their activities into local primary schools. However MBW funding was running out and they were seeking to stay in business through the European Reconciliation package; without European funding, the scheme would come to an end. (We will keep in touch with this aspect and do our best to ensure that, for the immediate future at least, the project is sustained).

General Comment

14. In assessing the views of the two senior Probation staff, it is usually necessary to aim off a little, to take account of their particular perspectives and their desire to keep the Probation Service centre stage. I did wonder whether the description of the Poleglass meeting as a "watershed" might be an exaggeration; and it is worth bearing in mind that the scale of the joyriding problem over Christmas and longer term trends do not suggest a massive increase in this activity. Nevertheless, especially in the light of comments from HALT, I think that there is a large element of credibility in much of what Mrs Gadd and Mr Brannigan say. Anti-social behaviour generally and the whole issue of paramilitary orchestrated punishments are matters of current concern. Despite the difficulties I intend to consider further with the police directorate whether there are ways of stimulating some positive thinking about how collectively we might meet this challenge at community level. In particular, it would make sense for probation staff to be engaging in constructive exchanges with the RUC sooner rather than later.

15. ACC White telephoned me on Friday last to ask for a meeting to discuss raising the penalties available to magistrates in "taking and driving away" cases. The meeting will take place on Wednesday and he may bring Bill Stewart with him. (I am not sure how critical this issue is, given that only around 18% of cases are "cleared up" and magistrates use the maximum penalty

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available to them in only a relatively small proportion of disposals). Apparently the RUC are preparing a revised strategy for countering joyriding, which will include measures to intercept those who steal cars elsewhere in the Province and then bring them back to West Belfast (a higher proportion of cars abandoned by joyriders in West Belfast come from outside the area than within). We may find out more about this on Wednesday, and about whether in parallel there is any fresh thinking on the community relations front.

(SGD)

J A DANIELL

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