



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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ConfidentialMeeting with Jesuit priests, Portadown

Mr Gallagher

You will recall that there was a recent exchange of correspondence between the Minister and Fr Timoney, Superior of the Jesuit House in Portadown (copy attached herewith for ease of reference). In follow-up to the Minister's reply, I called on Fr Timoney in Portadown on 17 August. We were joined by Fr Brian Lennon SJ who has been based in Portadown since 1980. (He is also editor of the Jesuit periodical "Studies".)

The Jesuits opened their Portadown House in 1980. The Order felt that they should have a presence in Northern Ireland and at the invitation of Cardinal O Fiaich decided on Portadown. They have 3-4 priests based there normally and these are involved with various groups and projects in Portadown and further afield. Fr Lennon has been there from the outset and has been actively involved within the nationalist community in the town, particularly on the parades issue.

Fr Timoney warmly welcomed the Minister's response to his letter and the opportunity to put their views to him. The issue of greatest concern to them was policing in general and handling of parades in Portadown in particular. Fr Lennon acknowledged that the situation in Portadown had improved in recent years (with the rerouting of Orange parades out of the heavily Catholic Obins St area etc). However, the continued use of the mainly Catholic Garvaghy Road remained a serious grievance for nationalists and the extent to which it still rankled had been underestimated in the media, who talked about the marching season having been "solved" and parades in Portadown passing off "peacefully". Fr Lennon said that there were 94 RUC landrovers on the Garvaghy Road for the Church parade there on 9 July. In those circumstances, with nationalists effectively locked into their

homes, to talk of parades passing off "peacefully" was to say the least disingenuous, he believed.

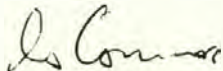
On the other hand, Fr Lennon and Fr Timoney believed that very real potential existed for improved relations between the RUC and the nationalist community in Portadown if the parades issue could be resolved. Fr Lennon felt that the RUC did not fully appreciate this and tended to take the view that there was nothing which they could do to improve relations. This attitude merely served to perpetuate the status quo.

Fr Lennon emphasised, however, that the settling of the parades issue was a sine qua non for progress in the wider RUC/nationalist community relationship. Moreover, he did not feel that a reasonable compromise on routing was out of the question. He suggested that an adjustment to the parade route (he gave me the details), which would still allow the use of a small section of Garvaghy Road would solve the Church parade problem (as you know, there are two contentious parades in Portadown - the annual Church parade on the Sunday before the Twelfth and the parade on the Twelfth itself). He was convinced from soundings he had made on both sides that such a compromise would be acceptable to the majority of people in both communities. As for the Twelfth, he felt that there was no justification for allowing Orangemen down Garvaghy Road as the route had not even the most tenuous connection with their destination - at least for the Church parade the argument could be made that Drumcree Church is in the vicinity of Garvaghy Road.

On a general note, Fr Lennon said that the practice of the NIO of designating the routing of parades as an "operational" matter and, therefore, exclusively the preserve of the RUC was unacceptable. I said that this was a point we had consistently made to the British authorities; the fundamental principle was that parades should not take place along routes where they are not welcome. I told Fr Lennon and Fr Timoney that the Government were most concerned about what happened at Ready and in Garvaghy, Road this summer and that the Minister had intended raising the issue at the meeting of the Conference due to have been held at

the end of July. The matter would now be included in the agenda for the next Conference.

(Comment: I feel that the Frs Timoney and Lennon are worth staying in touch with and for their part they appear to appreciate that direct contact has now been made with the Department. The contact is all the more useful since the SDLP are not strong in the town.)



T O' Connor

18 August 1989

cc Mr O' Donovan (on return)
Mr McMahon

