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in H. C. Murphy
H. C. Murphy
6/11

Conversation with Harold McCusker, M. P.

1. I met Harold McCusker at his home for a long discussion last weekend. He was in good form and, though still undergoing intensive and very severe treatment for his cancer condition, he looked better than I have seen him for some time.
2. McCusker said that he had consciously decided not to attend the recent Conference of the Official Unionist Party. He has for some time been very critical of the present Unionist leadership (Molyneaux, Smyth, Taylor) and, in general, tends to relate much more to the Ken Maginnis, Raymond Ferguson wing of the party. He also made the point, only half jokingly, that the slogan of the Conference - the party of the '90s - was only accurate if the '90s was read as the 1690s.
3. McCusker went on to say that, in the light of the apparent British refusal to respond positively to a number of the proposals we have put forward recently in the Conference, it might become extremely difficult to maintain the momentum of the Agreement. He believes there may also come a time when we could be confronted with a dearth of new issues to bring forward. In such circumstances, he saw a danger of issues being raised for what he called reasons of constituency pressure in the South rather than for reasons directly related to Northern Ireland.
4. He was delighted at the Guildford Four outcome and said that he has no illusions any longer about the fairness of police interrogation procedures in many such cases; and he was also highly critical of the attitude and approach of the judiciary to confessional evidence. He referred particularly to the case of the UDR four, whom he is convinced are innocent. Because of his illness, he has handed over his papers on the case to Peter Robinson and asked him to pursue it. While he did not ask that we raise

the case with the British, I got the impression that our support might be welcomed. (We are in fact looking at the case as a matter of urgency with a view to making a recommendation as to whether it might be raised in the Secretariat or Conference).

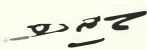
5. Other points made by McCusker were:

- he sees no possibility of political progress (and in particular on devolution) while Jim Molyneaux is in control of the Official Unionist Party. He expects John Taylor, whom he dislikes intensely, to take over in due course as leader. He would not rule out that Taylor - who is essentially an opportunist - might be prepared to consider entering into talks with the SDLP - and perhaps even at a later stage with Dublin - even though the Agreement had not been suspended. McCusker went on to repeat his own long held view that the key to unblocking political relations on this island lay in considering a change in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution;
- he made the point that violence against the RUC seemed no longer to be impacting seriously on the Unionist community, perhaps because there had been a significant change in the perception of the force in Unionists' eyes since the Agreement; as a result, the unionist community recently seemed less concerned about, and affected by, the IRA's campaign of violence than had been the case throughout the troubles;
- McCusker also mentioned that Molyneaux and Paisley had found Brooke very impressive, and much less inclined to try and impose his thinking and views on them than Tom King. Instead for instance of coming with a bulky brief to his meeting with them, as had been Tom King's

custom, he arrived with some sheets of paper and a pen, listened carefully and noted down their views;

- he said at some length that Séamus Mallon has recently lost a lot of credibility with Unionists, who consider that most of his statements have been "going over the top". McCusker mentioned, in particular, that Mallon had pushed his opposition to the Keady parade to extremes. In McCusker's view, there was very little real opposition in Keady to the parade and in fact the publicans, though staunch nationalists, welcomed the additional business involved. In support of his view, he gave me the attached photocopy of an article about the Keady parade by Dervla Murphy in the British Independent.

6. Finally, McCusker confirmed that Robinson was now a key player on the political scene and he agreed that it was important that we succeed in establishing direct contact with him. In this regard, he very helpfully agreed to try and arrange an early meeting between Robinson and myself.


Dermot Gallagher,
3 November, 1989.

cc: PST
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THE DIRTY OLD MAN
OF EUROPE:
AN INTERVIEW

GERMAINE GREER
ON THE RIGHTS OF RATS

ISABEL COLEGATE:
AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE
IN INDIA

THE CATHOLICS
OF ULSTER

THE INDEPENDENT

WAR AND PEACE IN ULSTER

After West Belfast, I needed Keady. For that little town in South Armagh, 12 July, 1989 was a testing date. Despite the population being 96 per cent Nationalist, the Orange Order consider it their right to march, aggressively beating a few score Lambeg drums, through the Main Street to their Field - something they have been doing for many generations. This year a small group protested vigorously, arguing that the RUC should have banned the march and forecasting violence.

Early on the morning of "the Twelfth" I strolled around the neat, graffiti-free town, observing some 300 RUC men and women arriving in armoured vehicles, donning bullet-proof vests, watering their police dogs and spreading out to prevent any marchers from intruding on Nationalist housing estates. Families stood outside their homes along the route, light-heartedly looking forward to Europe's most spectacular *genuine* folk-festival - primitive, tribal and with scary undertones, yet enjoyable if not scrutinised.

I asked several people, "Why did the RUC allow this march? Isn't it terribly provocative and intimidating?" All those Keady Catholics eyed me with mingled boredom and contempt. Their consistent verdict was: "This is a tradition. It's been going on forever. It's important for the Orangemen and it does us no harm. Let

them have their fun in peace!" I was made to feel very much an outsider, bumbling up from the South asking stupid questions. The Keady people cherish their own Nationalist traditions and were emphatically closing ranks with the Orangemen against what looked like incomprehending Southern criticism. A Northern Irish speciality is the bemusing paradox. It seemed that in some bizarre way this overtly anti-Catholic march was respected as part of the local culture. But the reverse situation is unimaginable: Orangemen defending a Nationalist tradition.

At the Field, some 20,000 Orangemen, women and children picnicked happily on grassy slopes under a hot sun. Along the skyline scores of brilliant Loyal Orange Lodge banners billowed in the strong breeze. As usual, only a tiny proportion of

the crowd paid any attention to the religious ceremony or to the bigoted ramming of their religious-cum-political leaders.

At 3pm, punctually, as previously arranged with the RUC, the crowd began amiably to disperse. I was then admitted to a pub through a locked back door. All Keady's business premises and offices were closed for the day; most pubs had been packed since noon and I found many Protestant farmers from the town's prosperous agricultural hinterland, merrily revelling with their Catholic friends. Seen close up, Northern Ireland - so dearily predictable from afar - is full of pleasant surprises. •

Still War: Photographs from the North of Ireland, by Mike Abrahams and Laurie Spatham, is published by Belfrage on 2 November at £13.50