



*Women's Coalition position on Parades Commission Adjudications
delivered on 6 July 1998*

The Women's Coalition fully supports an independent judicial process in regard to parading and protesting. We supported the establishment of the Parades Commission, though accept that it has had an inauspicious start.

The Parades Commission has a number of guidelines by which they make their deliberation, not least of which is the impact on community relationships. The NIWC lobbied hard to insert this criterion into the relevant legislation last year. The government's position has been that all guidelines bear equal weight.

The Parades Commission takes decisions in the absence of a local accommodation. The Women's Coalition has always placed a premium on dialogue. Our principle of inclusion does not distinguish between who can and who can't be involved in dialogue.

We accepted the decision of the PC regarding the Drumcree Church Parade. Impact on community relations was accepted as one reason to disallow the return route. No evidence of local dialogue was another.

The PC has delivered on some 23 Church and Main Twelfth parades. 15 of these have been re-routed. In only 7 cases no conditions are required. Two others are not re-routed, but conditions have been imposed. One of these two, the Ballynafeigh parade, is the most contentious.

The Parades Commission, declaring itself to be 'encouraged' by the initial positive steps taken by the Belfast Walker Club (Apprentice Boys, not LOL), finds little evidence of the effort required to prepare ground for a march through the lower Ormeau in 1998. Such intransigence should not be rewarded.

The Parades Commission, however, seems to have strayed from its own considerations in making this determination. From a reading of the other determinations there is no clear

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pattern between dialogue and resolution.¹ Indeed, the Garvaghy Residents took the view on Friday night that since the parades commission had made their ruling, they saw no need to negotiate. Their line has been around accepting the law of the land, and not to break it.

Clearly this is a problem of balancing rights. Dialogue is an absolute necessity in determining whether a march should go ahead. A cursory glance at the conditions imposed would suggest to us that the march would be acting with cognisance to the views of residents. But the key issue is dialogue.

While we are dissatisfied that the Parades Commission does not share our premium on dialogue, we feel it important that an independent judicial process is allowed to work, even when we find the decision unpalatable. It is appropriate, though, to take account of the wider impact on community relations in Northern Ireland in the context of events at Drumcree and elsewhere. This was a lobbying position of the NIWC in the writing of the legislation.

We would question, however, why the Parades Commission has introduced the Drumcree decision into the Ballynafeigh determination, and not into the other adjudications delivered. Insofar as there is inconsistency in the series of deliberations it is this. It suggests submerged macro-negotiations taking place elsewhere which may not involve any of the local parties to the disputed parade. We believe the Parades Commission should be left to conduct its business free from political intervention.

We urge all parties to pursue their protest to the deliberation through exclusively peaceful means. Further, we would urge that all parties should take the issue of political leadership seriously at this time. Anyone in a position of influence should exercise it for the good of the wider Northern Ireland community. In particular we urge the Loyal Orders to engage in dialogue with LORAG.

¹ E.g. In Downpatrick the PC is encouraged by organisers to meet concerns of local community, and there is no re-routing on main 12th. In Strabane no testimony on behalf of Orange, but no re-routing on No. 250 parade. There is re-routing on No. 14 parade. Keady LOL No.8 met with residents—no re-routing. But Keady LOL No.8 and LOL No. 298 13th July re-routed. Crumlin community forum established – dispute between it and Crumlin concerned group. Communication between Orange and CCF. No conditions imposed.