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ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF

THE ASSOCIATION OF GARDA SERGEANTS AND INSPECTORS

(AGSI)

AIDAN O'DONNELL

TO THE

AGSI COMMEMORATION EVENT

FOR THE MACUSHLA BALLROOM MASS MEETING

OF GARDAÍ

ON 4TH NOVEMBER 1961

Ladies and gentlemen, you are all very welcome to this, the AGSI Commemoration of the mass meeting by gardaí that was held in the Macushla Ballroom on the 4th November 1961 – a few days over 50 years ago.

In this function today we are not just commemorating the Macushla meeting, we are paying tribute to the hundreds of gardaí who put their careers on the line and who risked discipline and even dismissal by attending a meeting that the Commissioner of the day had ruled to be 'illegal'.

Not only that, we are paying a very special tribute to 11 members of the force that were actually dismissed as a direct

consequence of their attendance at the Macushla. We are all delighted that we have several of the dismissed members with us today to help us celebrate. We also have some of the spouses of dismissed members that sadly are no longer with us and other guests that were prominent in the representative movement of the time. I will welcome them individually later but I must say that it is both a pleasure and a privilege for us to bring them here today so that they can hear our tribute to them.

Let there be no mistake about it colleagues. The members who attended the Macushla took very real risks and faced very real danger of permanent dismissal. The ethos of the time was that one obeyed orders without question or face severe discipline. The members had been denied their basic right of free assembly and it took real courage to face up to that challenge and to attend the mass meeting.

The meeting was initially called – by what became known as the ‘secret committee’ - to protest against the latest ‘Pay Order’ that had given no increase in pay to any member with less than five years’ service. However other major factors were involved including the authoritarian manner in which the force was run and very poor barracks-style accommodation that the members were compelled to live in.

The discipline form was known as the ‘D1’. In those days printed on the bottom of the form was the following statement that appears to us today to be incredible: ‘To deny

the charge will aggravate the offence'! A complete denial of natural justice.

Going in to the hall the members had to run the gauntlet of a number of uniformed superintendents and inspectors who stood outside the door and made notes of the names of those they recognised. The meeting went ahead in any case. A loose ad-hoc committee was formed and a campaign started to overturn the 'Pay Order' and to secure a committee of enquiry into the pay and conditions of An Garda Síochána.

The subsequent facts are well known. On Thursday 9th November 50 years ago 11 members were issued with their dismissal notices in the name of Commissioner Daniel Costigan. Rumours abounded that more dismissals were in the pipeline.

A number of well attended meetings were held throughout the country and it was planned to hold another mass meeting in the Macushla on Sunday 12th November. However fate stepped in and Mrs Mary Helen Quinn, wife of the Assistant Commissioner for Dublin, William Quinn, was killed in a tragic car accident in the early hours of that very Sunday. The organisers decided to call off the second mass meeting in the Macushla as a mark of respect.

The Archbishop of Dublin, Most Rev Dr John Charles McQuaid, had been watching the events unfold with growing concern. He wrote in his personal notes and in relation to

the Macushla meeting that ““Something is wrong when decent men come out in such ways.” He rang the then Minister for Justice, Charles Haughey, to give his opinion that the matter had been badly handled and he offered to act as a mediator.

To cut a long story short, within the space of a few days the dismissed men had been re-instated with guarantees of no victimisation and no loss of service. It was announced that there would be a committee of enquiry into pay and conditions.

The subsequent few years were seminal in the development of the representative ethos as a fearless defender of the pay, welfare and conditions of service of members of An Garda Síochána.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have to pay particular tribute to one of our guests who was central to the foundation of the Macushla ethos – as I may call it – and to the gruelling, ground-breaking foundation work of the garda representative movement. That man was one of the dismissed but he never shirked for one moment in his drive towards empowering the basic rank of garda – and in turn all the other ranks – in the industrial relations sense. That man is Jack Marrinan and I ask you all to stand and to pay your tribute with applause to Jack who is accompanied by his wife Mary.

Thank you colleagues.

I will now hand over to Austin and we will proceed with the individual presentations.

MC – Austin Kenny

I deeply regret that we will not have Mick Harlowe or Dan Hanrahan here. Mick's wife is not well and Dan's household is in a state of chaos with the builders in – and he must be there to monitor their progress. We send them our good wishes.

Mrs Noeleen Keating

We are delighted to have with us Mrs Noeleen Keating, wife of the late Dick Keating who was one of the dismissed and who is recognised by all as the mainspring behind the Macushla meeting. Dick was the leader. He led the 'secret committee' that channelled the discontent into the Macushla meeting. A detective based in Pearse Street at the time Dick later became a detective sergeant and refused to go for further promotion, in spite of pleas by Edmund Garvey, because he did not want his family life disrupted.

I ask Mrs Keating to come up to receive her presentation.

Mrs Mary Corcoran

The late Liam Corcoran, one of the dismissed, was a native of near Thurles, Co. Tipperary. A garda at the time of the Macushla he was later promoted to sergeant, eventually to detective sergeant and served a distinguished role in the famous Murder Squad. We are delighted to welcome Mrs

Mary Corcoran here and I ask her to represent her late husband and to come up to receive her presentation.

Mrs Maedhbh O'Colmáin

It is almost tempting to describe Sean O'Colmáin as an 'enigmatic figure' but that is probably because at this distance it is hard for a stranger like myself to fully comprehend his personality and his impact on the proceedings.

Sean was a sergeant at the time of the Macushla and therefore not directly impacted by the pay deal, other than it was not generous, even to the mature members like him. He was also a member of the Garda Representative Body who had taken a High Court case in 1959 to secure votes for gardaí – something members take for granted nowadays. I notice that the sky hasn't fallen in!

Sean was instrumental in liaising between the 'secret committee', the archbishop and the government in the moves that led to the eventual settlement. Mrs Maedhbh O'Colmáin is the wife of the late Sean O'Colmáin. She is accompanied by her daughter Clothra who, as a very young child, helped make one of the banners calling off the second Macushla meeting.

I have very great pleasure in asking Mrs O'Colmáin to come up to receive her presentation.

Frank Mullen

Turning to the gentlemen we are honoured here today to have the presence of Frank Mullen who was a member of the

‘secret committee’ from the earliest inception. Frank had been working with Dick Keating, Mick Harlowe, Tom Bennett and others from an early stage. Frank was on the stage in the Macushla and he was involved in meeting with the archbishop on more than one occasion, setting the scene for the eventual settlement. Frank of course has been heavily involved in sport all his life and in the 1980s became vice-president and later president of the Garda Representative Association during which term he organised a presentation to mark the 21st anniversary of the Macushla.

I have very great pleasure in calling on Frank to receive his presentation.

Jack Marrinan

Our president has already paid a tribute to Jack Marrinan and I would like to be associated with that tribute. It is almost impossible to list the achievements of Jack in his long career of 27 years at the helm of the RGB and later the GRA.

There is no doubt, from all the witnesses that I have spoken to, that Jack was central to the Macushla – although he had not up to then been part of the ‘secret committee’. His drive and initiative asserted themselves from the beginning and he became the de facto chairman of the ad hoc committee loosely gathered from the floor of the Macushla. His abilities were recognised when he was invited to chair the regional meetings in Waterford and Cork – and was on the way to the others when the circumstances changed. He met the

archbishop's 'liaison officer', Fr Thomas Fehily of the Dublin Catholic Institute of Sociology and channels of communication were opened with the archbishop and the Minister. Jack, unfortunately, did not meet the archbishop at the crucial meeting that led to the settlement because, illegally, he had traded one cinema ticket for two on the black market so that his present wife, Mary, could go to the 'flicks' with him.

However we all know now that the dispute was settled and in the aftermath Jack became the general secretary of the RGB in 1962. Jack, almost single-handedly, changed the ethos of the garda representative movement into the professional approach that is adopted today.

I have great pleasure in calling on Jack to receive his presentation.

Michael Murphy

We give a special welcome to Michael Murphy who is one of our own, so to speak, and served for a short time on the AGSI executive before his promotion to superintendent. Michael was one of the Fitz Street 'gang' and recalls marching three abreast down to the Macushla – because they had a suspect with them and were determined that he was not going to get away!

Michael stepped in for Jack Marrinan at short notice to attend one of the mass meetings – in Limerick. There he was

spotted by his own inspector and the writing was on the wall – his dismissal notice arrived shortly afterwards. I have great pleasure in calling Michael Murphy up to receive his presentation.

Gerry Muldoon

Another warm welcome to Gerry Muldoon who was based ‘out in the sticks’ at Irishtown but who may have sealed his fate and was dismissed because he encouraged other members to attend the Macushla. Gerry recalls kicking the doors of the bedrooms in Irishtown to motivate the other members to go to the meeting.

Ironically, the night before he was dismissed, Gerry was allocated to patrol Merrion Road to protect the person and property of Commissioner Dan Costigan – who was about to dismiss him!

Gerry was also one of the few dismissed members to experience victimisation when he was denied a month’s plain clothes duty by a vindictive inspector.

I have great pleasure in calling on Gerry to come up to receive his presentation.

Michael Reid

We also have some guests here who were perhaps fortunate not to be dismissed, but who nevertheless played their part in this drama 50 years ago and whose dismissals may have been in the pipeline.

We welcome Michael Reid who was early on the stage at the Macushla and who later went on to represent Ireland in the Olympics in boxing. Michael also rose to the rank of Chief Superintendent.

Michael is particularly proud of the fact that in the wake of the Macushla meeting he gathered a record collection from his fellow CDU members to put to the 'Macushla Fund' to fight the good cause.

I ask Michael to come up for his presentation.

Martin Breen

Martin Breen was a more mature member than most of those involved in the Macushla, but nevertheless he played his part by making his car available to drive members of the 'secret committee' to regional meetings. He escaped dismissal through the friendly offices of his local sergeant in Ferns, Co. Wexford.

He was also a local representative fighting for improved conditions and once threatened to have press photographs taken of the mattresses in Clonkeen station – new mattresses arrived almost at once. The power of the press!

I ask Martin to come forward for his presentation.

John Collins

John Collins was one of the many members at Fitzgibbon Street who was incensed by the pay deal. They attempted a

meeting in the canteen but were thrown out by the station sergeant – as a result they booked the Macushla.

John is one of those who helped draft the messages pinned to bread boards that were also used to notify members that the second Macushla was cancelled and he was also part of a small group that tried to get the message out into the media. I ask John to come forward for his presentation.

Gerry Denn

Gerry Denn was also in Fitz Street and he was particularly outraged by the discipline form he eventually received: ‘to plead not guilty will aggravate the offence’. Imagine that happening today.

Gerry was based in Store Street but was billeted in Fitzgibbon Street where conditions were more congenial and cleaner. The station sergeant forbade the members to meet in Fitz Street so they took off down the road to the Canal Entrance of Croke Park! Eventually they secured the Macushla. I ask Gerry to come forward.

I must also mention here that, in the time spent organising this function, we have not been able to contact other members who were dismissed following the Macushla, or their representatives. I will mention here Tom Hegarty and Tony Stanton and the representatives of Tom Bennett and Donal Murphy. If anybody present here has any information I

would appreciate it if you could contact me now so that possibly we could honour them also before the year is out.

Michael Harlowe

Regretfully Michael Harlowe is not able to be present today because his wife is unwell. Michael, who now lives in his native Galway City, who was one of the first members of the 'secret committee' with Dick Keating, was on the stage of the Macushla and remained active throughout the episode, even though dismissed. It is my information that Michael was the one who urged Dick Keating forward to the microphone in the Macushla to get the meeting going. Michael was elected to the first Garda Representative Body after the Macushla in 1962 – with Jack Marrinan - and he remained on the body for several years.

That concludes our presentation ceremony and I ask our President, Aidan O'Donnell, to formally bring the proceedings to a close.