

Letter to *Irish News*

19th July 2011

Dear Sir,

Despite the fact that I feel contemptuous about the Orange Order, I admire the manner in which Danny Kennedy defends what is increasingly seen as the indefensible (Letters, July 18th). The history of the Orange Order has been a shameful litany of intimidation and supremacy. The Order provides religious camouflage for those members who continue to maintain a system of privilege and power and defines itself more by a hatred of Catholics than a love of Christ. These men of no popery are sustained by sectarianism and are shrouded in secrecy. All the soft focus media airbrushing or high powered spin-doctoring, like Orange fest and cartoon characters called 'Sash Gordon' cannot disguise the true nature of this sectarian organisation or its reason d'être.

The Orange Order has fought a two hundred year rearguard action against democracy in Ireland by opposing every progressive reform from the repeal of the anti-Catholic and anti-Dissenter penal laws to the Patten Report on the RUC. Any proposal which they perceived might weaken loyalist hegemonic domination in Ireland was vigorously opposed, often with threats of violence. The nature of the membership oath of the Order which seeks to ensure that there is no genetic contamination of the loyalist bloodline is more reminiscent of the white South African Brotherhood or the American Ku Klux Klan than of civil and religious liberties. These unelected politico-religious supremacists in the primordial pursuit of reminding nationalists of their subordinate role in the northern state must be confronted. Neither the nationalist community nor the rule of law should acquiesce in their threats and intimidation.

For many years, Johnny Adair and his private army of shaven headed, tattooed, muscle-bound thugs accompanied the Orange Order at Drumcree, and were warmly

welcomed by the Grand Panjandrums of the Brethren who saw nothing wrong with such an odious association, yet these same pillars of society still refuse to engage in face to face talks with the residents of Garvaghy Road and other areas in the North where the Orange Order parades against the wishes of local communities. Added to this is the bizarre fact that in excess of 60 Grand Officers of the Orange Order are also Church of Ireland ministers.

If Mr Kennedy feels I am unreasonably biased or unfair in my critique of the Orange Order, may I leave the final word to former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Patrick Mayhew. In 1992, a parade of Orangemen passing a bookmakers office in Belfast, where five Catholics had been shot dead by loyalists, ostentatiously gave a five fingered salute in mockery of the five men who had been murdered. Mr Mayhew said their actions "would have disgraced a tribe of cannibals let alone Protestants marching under a flag of the United Kingdom."

I suspect it will take more than cartoon characters and puffed up propaganda by Mr Kennedy to endear the Orange Order to those of us who value a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural sectarian free society.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Cooper

Cathaoirleach

Irish National Congress