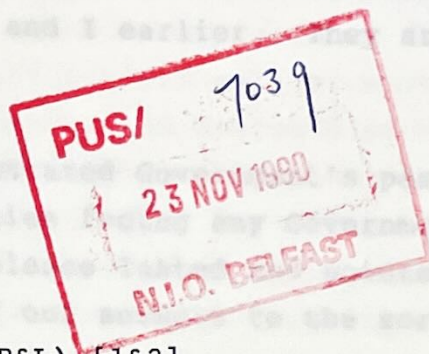


PAB/6683/DGMcN/RG

FROM: D G McNEILL, PAB  
 DATE: 23 NOVEMBER 1990



Copy No [ ] of 9

cc Mr Pilling [3]  
 Mr Ledlie [4]  
 Mr Alston [5]  
 Mr Deverell [6]  
 Mr Thomas [7]  
 Mr Marsh [8]  
 File [9]

PS/PUS (B&L) [1&2]**POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS**

1. I met the two chaplains from Maze Prison on 22/11/90 at their request. They were seeking an update following the meeting which PUS and I had with Bishop Cahal Daly.
2. There have been no significant developments on their front since John Blelloch and I spoke to them. However, we had quite a long discussion during which I was able to probe them on the nature of their contacts and on their perceptions more fully than was possible before.
3. They confessed to me that they were both fed up by the lack of movement on our part - even though they understood the rationale - and that they were frightened by the enormity of the issue with which they see themselves grappling. They also were very uneasy at dealing with paramilitaries. However, they still believe they are on to a possible path to peace and will not let go unless someone takes the burden from them or closes the path down.
4. I started the discussion by telling them about the conversation with Bishop Daly. However when I said that we understood from the Bishop that PIRA was still considering some questions put to them about the meaning of meaningful etc the two chaplains said that that was not so. PIRA had given its answer to those questions before - "meaningful" meant "with sincerity; not quibbling over words" and if

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the violence were to cease it would not restart even if "meaningful dialogue" was not a success. This is what they had told John Blelloch and I earlier. They are not awaiting any further detailed response.

5. I restated Government's position, confirmed the enormity of the difficulties facing any Government which might contemplate dialogue while violence lasted and pointed to the "British Presence" speech as one of our answers to the sort of questions the priests were being asked.

6. However, I did probe a little further stressing that I was doing so merely to brief myself on the issue. I said that I found it difficult to believe that PIRA would give up the armed struggle just so that PIRA/Sinn Fein could engage in political dialogue when the result of that political dialogue would seem to me likely to be that they would be able to assert less influence over events. The priests thought that PIRA wanted to find a way out of the armed struggle because of the loss of life and other negative aspects of violence - if they gave up violence they may be able politically to win support from SDLP supporters. However they could not abandon those members and supporters who had suffered and died over the last twenty years unless the organisation was able to say that it was in a dialogue which could lead to a political settlement. The priests still believe that the nature of that political settlement is not a condition for the ending of violence. I asked if the priests thought that PIRA was looking for a smokescreen. They thought that could be the case.

7. They repeated again that these contacts started with Sinn Fein and then changed to PIRA Army Council and though I did not learn any names I did find out that Martin McGuinness was not one of the contacts and that the Sinn Fein contacts were two people from different parts of Northern Ireland. The priests also detected some tension between the Army Council contacts and some of Sinn Fein's public pronouncements.

8. We talked about the proposition which had been put to the priests that violence could cease after the first meeting with

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Government at any level provided that "meaningful dialogue" would ensue. I explored this further again as someone who was briefing himself. I said for instance that what they seemed to be suggesting was that if a civil servant were to be authorised to talk or pass on the message to the contacts such as - Government can't talk to your organisation while violence goes on but, if violence were to cease (and this was added following the conversation about the concept of condemnation) without Government requiring a condemnation of previous violence, then Government at political level would be prepared to meet Sinn Fein representatives to discuss issues of concern to Sinn Fein, then violence would cease. I was suitably sceptical of this but they thought that this was something which could "turn the trick".

9. We concluded our discussion more or less there. However, in conclusion they said that they had not sought a meeting with their contacts since just before they spoke to John Blelloch and I because they had nothing to tell them but they were keen not to lose the contacts. They asked me if I thought it would be a good idea to put the suggestion in paragraph 7 to PIRA. I said absolutely not. I said we were still reflecting on the matter within the NIO and while we were doing so, firstly PIRA should not be allowed to think that we were considering an approach and secondly if there were such an approach it would be better if it were made fresh rather than floated as the priests' idea. They were very keen however to meet their contacts again. They confirmed when I asked that the contacts knew that the priests had talked to the NIO. I said then that if the priests were looking for an excuse to talk to the contacts again they could say that they had read the Secretary of State's "British Presence" speech and had gone to see the NIO for clarification of the messages; and that they had got that clarification. They could then ask their contacts what they thought of the speech and ask to clarify for themselves Sinn Fein's response. They agreed to keep in touch with me.

10. I have not at this stage copied this note to Ministers. PUS may wish to consider that. However it may be useful to discuss this

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conversation further. The priests will not go away unless we tell them that they are wasting their time or put a firm proposal to them. However we are getting very close to the time when we need to be firmer in our response to them one way or the other. They are sincere, dedicated and tenacious men whose integrity and sincerity are not in doubt although they are politically very naive.

(SIGNED)

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- cc PS/Secretary of State (D&L) [142]
- PS/Minister of State (D&L) [354]
- PS/PUS (D&L) [544]
- Mr Pilling [7]
- Mr Ledlie [8]
- Mr Alston [9]
- Mr Devarell [10]
- Mr Thomas [11]
- Mr Fetch [12]
- Mr Marsh [13]
- File [14]

BISHOP CAHAL DALY: POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS

1. PUS and I discussed this subject on 20/11/99 with Bishop Cahal Daly at his home.
2. The Bishop said that he had recently met with the two Here chaplains to discuss their contacts with PIRA/Sinn Fein. He made clear that the RC Church (and the Church of Ireland) does not wish these two men to be regarded as intermediaries. They were merely men who felt it their duty to try to assist those willing to consider a more moral route. He said that he was fully satisfied with the integrity and the common sense of both men whom he had known for some time and who had worked hard to become acceptable to people from both sides. He was confident that the two men from PIRA/Sinn Fein to whom the chaplains were talking were men who were speaking for PIRA/Sinn Fein as an organisation.
3. The Bishop fully recognised the enormity of the difficulties which Government would face in dealing with people representing organisations engaged in violence. He said that no Government could be seen to be doing that.
4. He said that he knew that PIRA/Sinn Fein was considering a series of questions which had been relayed to them through the chaplains on his behalf and which had been suggested by John