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FROM: S A MARSH, PAB
DATE: 30 NOVEMBER 1990

1. Mr McNeill [1] [Agreed D McNeill 30/11]
2. PS/Secretary of State (B&L) [2&3] - B

- cc PS/PUS (B&L) [4&5] - B
 PS/Sir K Bloomfield [6] - B
 Mr Ledlie [7] - B
 Mr Pilling [8] - B
 Mr Alston [9] - B
 Mr Deverell [10] - B
 Mr Thomas [11] - B
 Mr Petch [12] - B
 File [13]

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"WHITBREAD" SPEECH: FURTHER RESPONSES FROM THE PROVISIONALS

It is now clear that the speech the Secretary of State delivered on 9 November has stimulated a good deal of thought within the Provisional movement. Leaving aside the initial and, as far as we know, not fully considered, knee-jerk reaction, there have to date been at least four public responses from Sinn Fein. A lengthy press release was issued over Gerry Adams' name on 18 November; this was followed up by a letter from Adams to the Sunday Tribune which was published on 25 November. There has also been an article by Mitchell McLaughlin in the 26 November Irish News and, most significantly, the publication on the same day in the Irish Times of an interview between Adams and Mark Brennock, their NI correspondent.

Political analysis

2. Taken together, these responses in what they say do not add up to anything very novel in terms of the Provisionals' presentation of their political analysis of the problem. The 18 November press release in particular follows the "Scenario for Peace" line that HMG must declare an intention to withdraw from NI and work towards the establishment of a sovereign, independent Ireland. This line is echoed in the other statements and is encapsulated in the 26 November interview, in which Adams says that the British reasons for remaining in NI are "classical colonial" and that in the circumstances the use of force is a legitimate tactic on the part of republicans.

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3. The attitude to Loyalism also remains much the same; Loyalists are still regarded as Irishmen who have to be brought to realise that their future lies in a united Ireland, and that although their cultural differences will be accommodated they have no right to a veto on Irish unification. What is perhaps new is an acknowledgement that Loyalists are undergoing a crisis of identity; and the language used in describing them has softened slightly.

4. The only significant departure in terms of political analysis is Sinn Fein's call for all nationalists to "test" what Adams is describing as HMG's declaration of neutrality. This should be done by coming together to persuade the Government to abandon its "pro-active defence of the Union" and instead to shift its strategy and resources towards creating peace and stability in the context of the active promotion of a united Ireland. There is, says Adams, an "urgent need" for this; if nationalists can persuade HMG of the validity of this path an alternative to the armed struggle will have been found.

Talks?

5. If the essence of Sinn Fein's political analysis remains little altered by the 9 November speech, the same may not necessarily be true about opening a direct dialogue with HMG. In the press release and the letter to the Sunday Tribune Adams simply repeats the claim that the Provisionals have a democratic mandate to represent the views of their electorate and that sooner or later HMG will have to do business with them. Needless to say, the Provisionals are willing to enter into immediate talks without preconditions to advance the aims set out in the previous paragraph. Mitchell McLaughlin takes this a stage further by implying that talks could begin on the basis of acceptance of the participants' different opinions on the best way to move forward.

6. But the most significant utterances are to be found in Adams' interview with the Irish Times. After making the ritual point that all parties (including HMG) used violence to advance their ends, he said that if the issue of Irish national self-determination were "put on the agenda" he would be prepared to "take political risks"

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to do something "in the general interest" regardless of whom it pleased or displeased. He went on to say that he was prepared to have discussions with anyone in the present situation if he were persuaded of the possibility of moving "the entire position on towards peace and justice" and that this was the case regardless of what controversy or whatever difficulties this might cause. He also said that others should also take political risks to meet him all half-way. other developments, in the near future.

Other comments

7. Other well-placed commentators are claiming to detect signs that the Provisionals may be looking for ways to end violence. Mary Holland has picked up the point. And, significantly, there was an article by Father Alex Reid in yesterday's Irish Times; this has since been backed up by an interview on BBC Radio Ulster today. Reid puts republican violence into its historical and moral context and offers the opinion that under certain circumstances the Provisional movement could be persuaded to end its strategy of armed force. To bring this about it would be necessary for there to be dialogue, first among nationalists and then on the part of all concerned. The intention would be to convince the Provisionals that their aims could best be advanced on political channels in a kind of pan-nationalist approach. Reid implies that there is now a will on their part to bring this situation about. He also makes the point that some in the Provisionals see violence as inhibiting the development of such an approach; it may be that its achievement would be a prize to some in the Provisional movement. Unsurprisingly he believes that in the circumstances it is vitally important for all channels of communication to be kept open and he concludes that the Roman Catholic Church is best placed to bring the parties together.

Conclusion

8. It is, at the very least, noteworthy that the Provisionals have taken so much trouble to put on the record their response to the Secretary of State's speech. If their basic political analysis (or at least their public presentation of it) has not altered much as a result, there are nonetheless signs of a change in their tactics. Their language towards loyalists may conceivably have softened a

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little, and Adams in particular seems more willing than before to enter, and participate in, the mainstream of nationalist political thought. But the obstacle to this remains, of course, the Provisionals' use of physical force. This, to use Reid's word, represents the crucial impasse.

7. Officials will be providing further advice in the light of all this, and other developments, in the near future.

[Signed SM]

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PROVINCIAL'S RESPONSE TO THE "WHITEHALL" SPEECH

We have obtained a full text of Gerry Adams' response to the Secretary of State's speech on 9 November. This is attached.

2. The tone and content are impressively familiar offering little for our comfort. Some omissions are directly lifted from Sinn Féin's standard reference on this subject "Somerville for Peace" which was first issued in May 1987.

3. What is of interest is that Sinn Féin felt it necessary to respond quickly and at length to the Secretary of State's speech. To that extent we do have them dancing to our tune. However there is no sign of a serious intention to adjure violence before entering on political debate, unless we foreclose the option of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland being allowed a separate vote on their future.

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