

E.R.

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FROM: J McCONNELL
AS(PAB)

COPY NO. 5 of 8.

Additional copy to: Mr Thomas

30 November 1989

cc PS/SofS (L&B) [1&2]
PS/PUS (L&B) [3&4]
Mr Burns [5]
Mr Deverell [6]
Mr Miles [7]
Mr J Daniell [8]

4/12.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

FURTHER DISCUSSION WITH FATHER REID

Father Reid contacted me on Sunday 19 November and, at his request, arranged to meet in my office on Wednesday 22.

2. We spent the first ten minutes in, what is now a traditional manner, discussing some prisoners, in which he has an interest, and other matters pertaining to prisons. He then told me he would like to elaborate on some of his own activities in Northern Ireland and went on to tell me that he is involved at various levels with paramilitaries and Sinn Fein most particularly in relation to prison matters and prisoners families but also acting almost as an intermediary between paramilitaries and those people who have been "sentenced" for some crime. In these cases he is generally approached by the family of the victim and will attempt to mediate with whoever necessary with the aim of stopping the punishment. He made it clear that this activity takes up a great deal of his time and also an activity which he finds very harrowing in that he is asked to deal with all sorts of punishments including the ultimate one of death. His superiors in the Redemptorist Order in Dublin have agreed to detail some other priests to assist him in these matters so that he will have more time to devote to the main issue, "the cessation of violence".

3. At this point Father Reid told me that he and his superiors, with the assistance and knowledge of Cardinal O Fiaich, are working on a blue-print which they hope will pave the way towards stopping violence. The main players in this scenario will be the Irish Government, the SDLP and Sinn Fein and he hopes that the Church's role will be to encourage them to move in a certain direction which will replace PIRA as the only pressure group available to Republicans.

4. He then gave me an outline of what their current thinking is but stressed that they were still in the formative stages and went on to say that subject to approval from his superiors he will give me full details when they are available (two to three weeks).

5. Basically what the plan rests on is the creation of another body which will allow constitutional nationalists and republicans to force Sinn Fein and PIRA to understand that the only mandate there is in Ireland for republican or nationalist ideals is through the ballot box and discussion. He sees this body as a convention, to be called by the Irish Government, to which all politicians in Ireland would be invited (including Unionists). The ostensible purpose of this convention would be to create a forum where violent republicans could feel that they had a better chance of achieving change than by following their current activities. At this point I said to him that it seemed highly unlikely that Unionists would attend such a convention and if that was the case what could possibly be achieved by such moves. He responded saying that he did not care whether such a convention reached the conclusion or not the main purpose was to take away the *raison d'etre* for the continuation of violence as far as his people are concerned the convention could go on forever so long as it achieved that particular purpose.

6. The early stages of such discussions would be aimed at further developing the debate which he claimed is still going on within Sinn

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Fein and also to give people like Adams, Hartley and others (unnamed) their opportunity to make some sort of a move without losing credibility. The Church cannot and will not get involved publicly in political matters but he imagines if such a scheme gets off the ground then the Cardinal will merely give his blessing as another method of trying to achieve some sort of political stability in Ireland.

7. I asked him how far this process had already gone and he said that although they have not reached a final set plan other discussions have gone on already based on an assessment of John Hume's discussions with Gerry Adams and drew my attention to Mr Haughey's speech to his Ardfeis earlier this year when he referred to a convention etc (copy attached). He would not be drawn on who the discussions were with but he did refer me back to his assessment that the main players would have to be the Irish Government, SDLP and Sinn Fein. I asked him what role he saw HMG playing and he responded by saying that the Cardinal had specifically requested him to talk to me and give me whatever details were available on the basis that nothing can work in Ireland unless HMG is at least aware of what is going on. At this stage he does not think that a great deal more is required though he imagines that the position could be reached where, if the convention "got off the ground" HMG would take much the same position as the Cardinal ie anything that can help to bring peace is worthwhile.

8. He ended by saying that he will be retained by his superiors to take forward this initiative because of his existing contacts (he specified Adams and Hume but did not mention anyone on the Irish Government side) and he also led me to believe that, while this is the main game, he has not entirely abandoned all other avenues.

Conclusion

9. I am now reasonably sure that Father Reid's current initiative (possibly even his previous activities) are part of a larger scheme

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in which he is playing a catalytic role. He has not pursued an earlier approach to me which was that he might go back and speak to Adams and confirm if the situation which pertained in 1987 is still current and I think from what he says that he will be spending a great deal of his energy and time in the coming months on this new "plot".

10. If and when Father Reid comes back to me with a final blueprint I am sure it will be quite easy to pick major holes in the scenario but I am equally sure that those who are working with Father Reid will also be aware of the shortcomings. I made no comment to Father Reid other than the fact that it was highly unlikely that Unionists would have anything to do with such plans but he and his friends seem very sure that this is not vital so long as they can involve the hard republican movement in that once the violence is defused it actually opens the way to the sort of persuasion which is suggested in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and which could never be achieved through violence.

11. When I said in the body of the report that I felt Father Reid would be pursuing other avenues I concluded this from his final remark when he said that none of these subterfuges would be necessary if Gerry Adams could sit down and speak on the telephone or face-to-face with Mr Brooke and Mr Haughey. I will keep copy recipients informed as and when there are further developments.

J E McCONNELL

EXT 238(SH)