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FROM: D G McNEILL, PAB  
DATE: 24 JANUARY 1991

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- cc 25/1 PUS (B&L) [2&3]
- Mr Ledlie [4]
- Mr Alston [5]
- Mr Deverell [6]
- Mr Thomas [7]
- Mr Petch [8]
- Mr Marsh [9]
- File [10]

*Useful to in para 5  
is the key question for action  
- but it may be time to take  
stock with the group again soon.*

Mr Pilling [1]

**POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS**

1. I attach an outline sketch of some critical dates which we need to keep in our minds over the next few weeks as we consider events which may unfold in both the Political Development and the Political Movement processes.

2. On the Political Development process one can but speculate at this stage on possible dates though the suggested outline may well be close to the mark if matters on that front are not stalled for other reasons. The outline indicates that intense activity on that front will be likely during March/May.

3. On the Political Movement front nothing may happen in which case this minute is irrelevant. However there are indications that Adams' address to the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis on 2 February will be significant - though the agenda does not include as an item the possibility of a ceasefire. Furthermore Easter may be significant in that it may well be that the Provisionals are considering an Easter ceasefire whether encouraged or not by us. However the more critical dates in my view are those which begin in May with the 10th anniversary of the death of Bobby Sands. That death and the others cut deep into the Republican psyche. In my view they cut so deep that the Movement is unlikely to be receptive in that period to those who may be promoting an end to violence unless violence has

*75<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary  
1950*

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ended before that. That means that the activities of those who wish to promote an alternative strategy may well intensify during February-April so that, if they see good prospects of a cessation of violence and a pursuit of a more political approach, they can deliver that before the beginning of the May-Summer period.

4. At this stage I am doing little more than drawing attention to the critical dates of the two parallel processes. However if my reading of the possible "parallel" timescales is correct it will mean that intensive activity may occur on both fronts at the same time. It may well be possible to keep both processes on separate rails during that period - and there are arguments for keeping the political development process stoked up and at full steam in that it may keep the republicans under some pressure and in any event Government could not in any credible way abandon it.

X | 5. However, I am not convinced that we can keep the processes apart for very long. Firstly some of the participants are involved in both; secondly issues dealt with in one process may well impact on the development of issues in the other; thirdly critical dates in either process may interact. For those reasons alone we need to clarify our strategic aims on the question of Political Movement particularly in relation to dealing with any interaction between it and the other process fairly soon. I think immediately after the Conference on 31 January. Furthermore we may well need to be ready to disseminate those aims more widely within the office.

6. However, there are other reasons for clarifying our strategic aims and indeed going further and considering the need for a more systematic approach to developing, co-ordinating and monitoring activities. In respect of Political Movement there has been action on a number of fronts in the past few weeks and there is no reason to suspect that that sort of pattern will not continue. Some of these fronts have major significance; others are comparatively minor. However each contains the risk of producing at the very least a confusing signal and at the worst a signal which could damage action on another front.

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7. Some of the recent and ongoing actions include speculation inadvertently by an official or minister. I do not understand (i) contact with the chaplains; involving that step could involve. However I am concerned that we should get as firm an administrative (ii) continuing action on the Springvale front (the official in charge is due to transfer perhaps in March);

10. (iii) contact with the Quakers;

(SIGNED) (iv) Dr Mawhinney's discussions with Mr Millington;

? (v) discussions with Pax Christi - Mr Ledlie, Nigel Hamilton and me;

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(vi) David Trimble's query to the Prime Minister.

(vii) Fr Faul's letter on Easter parole.

(viii) Gerry Adams' letter to the Prime Minister.

8. All of these have been/are being picked up and handled in a way which should not damage any strategic aim. However there was an element of chance in the way in which some of them were picked up. It may well be time to consider formulating some more systematic machinery so that these issues can be dealt with in a less "chancey" way and so that action like that of DOE in Springvale can continue to develop in ways which are not unhelpful to activities to which those in charge are not aware. Any machinery could also be used to develop in helpful ways activities which encourage the Provisionals to seek the political route.

9. Taking that step of course, contains the real risk that we could be misunderstood - since we could not do it and keep it a very tight secret. However it may be possible to do it by presenting it as something which is necessary because of the ill-informed speculation which is rife about dealings between Government and PIRA

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and so that Government can ensure that no fuel is added to that speculation inadvertently by an official or minister. I do not underestimate the difficulties which taking that step could involve. However I am concerned that we should get as firm an administrative grip on this issue as we can so that it does not get out of control.

10. I am ready to discuss.

(SIGNED)

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**CRITICAL DATES**

Political development (possible)

31 January:

Conference meeting

Early/mid February:

further meetings with  
SDLP/unionists

Early March:

Conference and beginning  
of "gap"

March-April:

Intensive talks

May/June:

Agreement

Illegal width.

Printout terminated by system.

"Political movement"

1-3 February:

Sinn Fein Ard Fheis

29 March-1 April:

Easter

24 April:

Actual 75th  
Anniversary of 1916  
(Rising)

5 May-20 Aug:

Hunger strike deaths