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PAB/6846/DGMcN/RG

FROM: D G McNEILL, PAB
DATE: 25 JANUARY 1991

[Copy No 2 of 10]

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POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS: MAZE CHAPLAINS

1. I met the two Maze chaplains (Revs Murphy) on 23/1/91. The meeting was arranged because they are due to meet Archbishops Daly and Eames and Bishop Poyntz this week.
2. The meeting took place in a very difficult and strained atmosphere. Both men felt frustrated that I had nothing concrete to say to them. They said that they were considering packing it in and needed considerable reassurance that I was not cynically stringing them along. They had not had any further contact with their PAC contacts since Christmas because they had nothing to say - though the person who arranges the contacts and who is seen by one of the chaplains regularly has been asking about developments.
3. I told them that we were still seriously considering their proposal and reminded them of the major difficulties involved. I also reminded them of the fact that there was action on another front. They still stress that their contacts insist that direct contact between Government and the PAC would produce an almost immediate cessation of violence. Our meeting was really a repetition of points previously made though I did give them an assurance that as soon as we reached a firm conclusion either that their proposal was not on or had a signal for them to consider I would let them know.

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4. They did remind me that they had also told us earlier that in their initial contacts with paramilitaries they had had contact with the UVF and that that contact remained useful in the event of a cessation by PIRA.

5. They will have a full discussion with the Archbishops and their Bishop this weekend. I told them about the discussion PUS and I had with Archbishop Eames. Following their meeting they will contact me again. They left in a clearly sombre mood and forecast that the next time we met I would tell them that their proposal was not on. I continued to reassure them that we were seriously considering the option and exaggerated somewhat by saying that although they had been in contact for about two years we had only begun to give their proposal substantive consideration in November 1990 and that these things take time.

Comment

6. As I feared the chaplains cannot be strung along much longer. I will have to see them next week or the following week and unless I have something to say to enable them to go back to their contacts with something concrete they may seek a meeting with their contacts to say at least that they see no prospects of Government responding positively to the proposition. That may not be a big loss if movement on the other front continues. However I do not want to sign them off until we are ready to defend that if necessary to the Archbishops. Therefore if there is nothing more which I can say and at the risk of confusing the other front I could draw their attention to the Secretary of State's radio interview in Dungannon. That may keep them bubbling for a little longer.

7. One point which they did raise was that at Christmas time after they had given the message to their contacts about the opening of the PVCs they learned that the organisation had got three such messages. I know I spoke to two people; I know nothing of any other signal if one was sent and if any of the copy addressees can clarify that it would be useful. However if at least one of the signals

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which was reported to the chaplains was the other signal which I sent it does seem to indicate that although the chaplains think that the two channels are distinct the Provisionals may have arrangements to co-ordinate activities on both.

(SIGNED)

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