

CONFIDENTIAL & PERSONAL

PAB/3696/AG

PS/Secretary of State (L&B)-B

cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
Mr Burns - B

CONVERSATION WITH FATHER ALEC REID (CLONARD MONASTRY)

Father Reid rang me on 9 February to ask me to try and get some details about a prisoner who was serving a life sentence. We then had a brief conversation about the workings of the Life Sentence Review Board and the allegations made by some of the people he is in contact with, that it is biased against Republican prisoners. I assured him that this was far from the truth and that all prisoners receive equal treatment but it was extremely difficult to deal with those prisoners who failed to take part in the review procedure. He arranged to ring me at my home on the night of Thursday 11 February so that I could give him whatever information I could about the prisoner.

2. He rang me on 11 February and after dealing with the particular problem he had in relation to the prisoner, he immediately started to talk about Sinn Fein. It started in the first instance when he talked about Republican prisoners refusing to participate in the Life Sentence Review system, despite the urging of the political people in their organisation to do so. He went on to say that the worst thing that had happened to Sinn Fein was that they had been isolated by HMG and other political parties thus driving the politicians among them to clearer support for violence a situation which might have been avoided .

3. According to Father Reid major elements within the Sinn Fein leadership, including the leader, are interested in pursuing a political course but are having difficulty in achieving this aim. I told him I found it very hard to believe and asked him if the organisation would have any locus in local politics if they were to abandon the "armed struggle" because it seemed to me without this it

CONFIDENTIAL & PERSONAL

CONFIDENTIAL & PERSONAL

was just an ordinary "United Ireland Party" without the firm policies of the SDLP. Father Reid disagreed with this saying that the political niche which had been carved out by Sinn Fein over the last period of time would be quite sufficient to carry them through if they were to simply be political. I told him it seemed to be that the choice of going political or remaining as they were was one which was entirely in the hands of that particular organisation

4. He at no time mentioned the meeting between Adams and Hume but during the conversation when I had said to him about Sinn Fein having no position in local politics he mentioned something about some people having a common cause which could carry them through. He said, at this stage, that I need no worry about him bandying my name around in outside circles because he had a reputation of being discreet and would never betray any confidences.

5. I spoke to Mr Burns about these conversations - he recommended that I record what has happened to date and he agreed that should Father Reid, when he calls me again, suggest a meeting that I bring him to Stormont House and meet him on my own territory with another member of PAB. I don't think that he is, or expects me to, act as an intermediary, but in the circumstances I would rather be sure than sorry.

(signed)

J E McCONNELL
Political Affairs Division
15 February 1988

AG687

CONFIDENTIAL & PERSONAL