

SECRET AND PERSONAL

PUS/391

05 DEC 1990

N.I.O. LONDON

11

PAB/6705/DGMcN/RG

FROM: D G McNEILL, PAB
DATE: 5 DECEMBER 1990

DESK IMMEDIATE

Copy No [2] of 9

cc PS/PUS (B&L) [1&2]

Mr Ledlie [3]

Mr Pilling [4]

Mr Alston [5]

Mr Deverell [6]

Mr Thomas [7]

Mr Marsh [8]

File [9]

Note for the Record

Ry

5/12

POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS: PRISON CHAPLAINS

1. Both Reverends Murphy came to see me on 4/12/90. They requested the meeting. Following my last meeting with them on 22/11/90 they have had a further meeting with their two Provisional Army Council contacts.
2. The two priests told me that they had discussed the Secretary of State's British Presence speech with the PAC contacts. The priests made the point to the PAC that the Secretary of State's speech was something which they regarded as a signal to PIRA aimed at encouraging them to seriously consider ending violence. The two PAC contacts said that initially they had read the speech that way but when the PAC debated the speech others on the PAC had said that that was not the case and those others pointed to media coverage which they claimed did not support the argument that it was a signal from the Secretary of State. The PAC contacts did not explain why that perception was held. The two PAC contacts told the priests that those arguments had swayed the PAC to take the view that there was nothing new in the Secretary of State's speech. However, showing some inconsistency, the two PAC contacts told the priests that had the messages in the Secretary of State's speech been conveyed directly by Government to them it would have "gone a long way" to achieving peace.

SECRET AND PERSONAL

RG/8471

SECRET AND PERSONAL

3. A further significant area in the discussion with the PAC contacts concerned the relationship between Sinn Fein and the PAC. The priests said that the PAC contacts became quite frustrated when one of the priests inadvertently linked Sinn Fein and PIRA. Their contacts took pains to tell them that they were not the same organisation, that the Government was misreading the situation if it thought that it could work solely through Sinn Fein and that while direct talks with Sinn Fein may produce peace eventually it would take a long time but that direct talks with PIRA would produce an end to violence almost immediately.

4. I confessed that I was puzzled about that and offered the personal view that, even if by some almost incredible chance, talks with PIRA were to begin, Government could not continue to have dialogue with anyone other than elected representatives. The priests assured me that the PAC contacts realised this and (although this was after considerable probing by me which may have produced a wishful thinking response) they offered the view that the PAC would be content with telling the Republican Movement that it rather than Sinn Fein had produced the conditions under which meaningful political dialogue with Sinn Fein could be embarked upon.

5. The meeting between the priests and PAC ended without any further commitments being entered upon. However the priests thought that the mood of the PAC contacts was more positive and they detected some signs that the PAC saw significance in the dialogue that the priests had had with the NIO.

6. However, it is quite clear that the priests are becoming frustrated. They have set themselves a deadline of the end of December and say if nothing has happened by then they will seek no further dialogue - though it was clear that their heart was not in that statement. Nonetheless they keep reminding me that they have been at this for almost two years without producing any results from the NIO. I gave them an assurance that I would contact them again

SECRET AND PERSONAL

RG/8471

SECRET AND PERSONAL
SECRET AND PERSONAL

PAS/8705/DGMCB/RG

FROM: D G McNEILL, PAR
next week even if I had nothing to say. I thought it prudent to give them that assurance since they are reluctant to break off dialogue and I can hold them at this stage by that sort of assurance.

Comment

7. It is not difficult to find some inconsistencies or confusing statements in the dialogue with the PAC. This may be because the PAC wishes to confuse the priests; it may be because the PAC are not sure themselves where they wish to go or if they can carry the organisation; or it may be due to the fact that the dialogue at this stage has become rather sterile and repetitive and will not lead anywhere without a change in approach by either the PAC or by us. The priests certainly feel that we are prevaricating needlessly and, while they fully realise the difficulties in direct contacts with the PAC at this stage, nonetheless do feel that low level direct contacts by the NIO may produce something at very little cost.

(SIGNED)

D G McNEILL
Political Affairs Division
SH Ext 2238

- (i) a clarification to PAC - better face to face; less than ideal through the chaplain (see below) - of the British Government's position on Northern Ireland in the British Presence Speech;
- (ii) an assurance that Government has no wish to exclude the Republican Movement from political dialogue;
- (iii) a commitment to engage in dialogue with the Republican Movement but only through its elected representatives in Sinn Fein when the PAC has publicly called for an end to violence;

SECRET AND PERSONAL

SECRET AND PERSONAL

RG/8471