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SECRET AND PERSONAL

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N.I.O. LONDON

PAB/7006/DGMcN/RG

FROM: D G McNEILL, PAB
DATE: 12 MARCH 1991

PS
Noted & discussed.
No further action on this
to the present.
cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) [3&4]
Mr Deverell [5]
File [6]
14/3

F
PS
As discussed

M

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

12/3

PA

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POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS: PADDY DOHERTY

1. I had a conversation on 8 March 1991 with Paddy Doherty a Community Employment Director in Derry. Doherty is someone who is well known in the Nationalist areas of Derry and formerly was a close associate of Mitchell McLaughlin (present Chairman of Sinn Fein) in community employment activities. He would also be well known to Martin McGuinness. Doherty and Mitchell McLaughlin know me of old and McLaughlin knows that I contact Doherty from time to time.
2. Some weeks ago Doherty and I discussed the current state of play in Republican circles. This was a straightforward discussion during which we covered predictable areas such as the British Presence speech, the Christmas ceasefire, the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis and the continuing PIRA campaign including the Downing Street attack. During that discussion I had taken a fairly provocative line and pointed out that while there may be some contrary signals the Provisionals did seem to be determined to keep up the campaign of violence, and in terms of political development did not seem to have moved much beyond a straightforward demand for a British withdrawal. I had also suggested that the Provisionals seemed peculiarly naive if they thought that any Government could accept their agenda without taking account of a substantial risk that that could produce a hostile reaction among the Unionists in Northern Ireland, among some people in the rest of Great Britain and indeed among some people in the wider international community. During that discussion there was no suggestion that I was stating views for transmission to the Republican Movement.

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3. Doherty told me on 8 March 1991 that following that earlier conversation he had talked to Mitchell McLaughlin and I suspect others in Sinn Fein. He told me that McLaughlin had expressed an interest in the fact that I was back in "political" circles and McLaughlin had taken pains to rebut some of the things which I had said to Doherty. McLaughlin had emphasised to Doherty that the Republican Movement's ultimate aim was a declared commitment by Her Majesty's Government that it would disengage from Ireland though the Movement was not setting a timescale on this. He had assured Doherty that the Movement in general was interested in a cessation of violence - but PIRA could continue it if they saw no other way. He had confirmed that the Christmas ceasefire was a deliberate demonstration of the Movement's ability to deliver a cessation (even if only temporary) of violence. It was further emphasised to Doherty that if the Movement decided to end violence it would end to all intents and purposes. The Downing Street and Rail Station bombs were described as hangovers.

4. McLaughlin had gone further and had said to Doherty that it might be useful if he (McLaughlin) and I could have a chat though McLaughlin had emphasised that he was not interested in engaging in such an activity if I was either stringing him along or not able to speak with some authority. It was not clear to me from my conversation with Doherty whether this had been an initiative taken by McLaughlin or whether Doherty had suggested it to him; it could have been a bit of both. I explained to Doherty our line on dialogue with the Republican Movement, said that I would not be able to talk to Mitchell McLaughlin without approval from my bosses. I said that anyway even if I were able to talk, although I might be able to explain policy, I was hardly in a position where I could negotiate in any meaningful way on a political agenda. However, Doherty did go on to say that McLaughlin trusted me and acknowledged that he and I in the past had been able to speak frankly to each other. I told Doherty that I would as a matter of course report this conversation to my bosses though I did not enter any commitment to respond specifically on this particular issue.

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5. Doherty and I went on to talk about the Secretary of State's British Presence speech and the Sinn Fein/PIRA response to it. We focussed on the Secretary of State's message that part of the British presence in NI refers to the Unionists. I said that I thought that Sinn Fein/PIRA underestimated the extent of this Britishness and it seemed to me that the Movement naively thought that the Unionist community would fall into line reasonably meekly in the unlikely event that HMG were to announce its intention to disengage. Doherty said that he saw some merit in my arguments and asked if I (and my bosses) would be interested in his (Doherty's) considered analysis of the Republican Movement's position at present. He said that he would provide this as an informed and interested bystander. I said that if he produced this I would certainly read it and if I thought there was anything in it I would show it to my bosses. The discussion more or less ended on that though I emphasised, and Doherty understands, that I am not setting up (even implicitly) a channel between Government and the Republican Movement.

Comment

6. Doherty is a sensible down to earth operator in community politics. He is well used to dealing with Government and is fully aware of the constraints on Government in dealing in this area. Apart from Mitchell McLaughlin to whom he has already spoken he has assured me that he will not disclose my conversation with him to anyone else. I believe him. At this stage it is too early to know whether this is a serious attempt by the Provisional Movement or some people in it to set up dialogue with Government. It may well be merely an opportunistic approach inspired as much as anything by Doherty's desire to see an end to violence. Nor is it clear whether McLaughlin was speaking for the Movement as a whole or for just a part of it. Doherty believes that he would not talk in this way without at least some cover. He did say that some Republicans had criticised McLaughlin for his criticism of the Rail Station bombs but he was sure that McLaughlin would not have made his statement on that issue without clearance. I will report if there are any further developments.

(SIGNED)

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