

DUSB/7648(MR/13290)

FROM: A W STEPHENS  
1 September 1989

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1-SEP-89 1546  
DUS'S OFFICE

cc PUS(L)-w/o enc.[2 of 8]

with enc:  
PUS(B) [3 of 8]  
Mr Burns(B) [4 of 8]  
Mr Deverell [5 of 8]  
Mr A P Wilson [6 of 8]  
File & Float [7 & 8]

MR BURNS(L)-BY BLIS [1 of 8]

PIRA AND THE ARMED STRUGGLE

There was a report in the Sunday Times of 27 August, by Liam Clarke, to the effect that a video was circulating in republican areas of Northern Ireland featuring a number of senior Provisionals - including Adams - and clearly designed to refute rumours that they might be harbouring doubts about pursuing the armed struggle. I attach a copy with the Belfast copies of this minute.

2. Notwithstanding the comment which Clarke makes about the unlikelihood of those who appear in the video being liable to prosecution, it seems to me that some of their alleged remarks - such as those attributed to Brendan Hughes - might well justify close scrutiny to see if they amounted to incitement; and I am rather inclined to urge the RUC to conduct such a scrutiny, assuming that they could get their hands on a copy of the video, which would not seem likely to be very difficult. However, we ought perhaps to give a little thought first to whether a prosecution would be helpful from a wider point of view - by which I mean whether it would carry the risk of killing off such possibility as exists that any internal debate which may be going on within the Provisionals' ranks will develop in favourable directions.

3. That, of course, begs the question of whether we believe that any such debate is going on, at any rate on a significant scale. I think we are all fairly sceptical about that (and the emergence of

this video is hardly calculated to make one any less sceptical, if the Sunday Times description of it is reasonably accurate). There is obviously an argument for saying wait and see - we may have a rather better idea of the prospects in a little while.

4. That may indeed be the right course. But experience tells me that if there is any possibility of persuading the RUC now to give serious consideration to bringing charges on the basis of the video, it will recede markedly with the passage of time. So, if we do opt for wait and see, I think we should do so in the knowledge that we may be leaving very little scope for urging a prosecution subsequently. (I may be quite wrong about this; the RUC may be contemplating a prosecution at this very moment. A neutral question might elicit whether this is so. But I doubt if it is).

5. Perhaps we could have a word about this when you are in Belfast at the beginning of next week. Copy addressees may wish to be involved.

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A W STEPHENS

SH 511, SC 244

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