

SECRET AND PERSONAL

M. Burns

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FROM: J E MCCONNELL
DATE: 14 AUGUST 1989

Mr Stephen Leach - B (1)

cc PUS (L&B)-B (2)
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File - (7)

But, earlier Mr?

FURTHER DISCUSSION WITH FATHER ALEX REID

1. Fr Reid contacted me on 8 August to ask for a meeting to discuss two prisoners, his usual excuse for a meeting, and I arranged to meet him in my office at Stormont House on Friday 11 August.
2. We spent a few minutes discussing the prisoners in which he has an interest and then moved on to the main reason for his call. He told me that there is a debate going on within Sinn Fein over their current strategy. The debate could not be described as a split but it was giving people such as Gerry Adams, Martin Maginness, Tom Hartley, and Danny Morrison some food for thought.
3. Fr Reid then described to me what he understood the Sinn Fein/PIRA position to be in relation to their aims - they have two aims - the first and major one being self determination and the second the aspiration to a 32 county socialist republic. He said that it is his understanding that if they can achieve the first they are quite prepared to abide by the voice of the Irish people in relation to the second. John Hume, during his talks with Gerry Adams et al had made the point that self-determination had already been achieved through the Anglo-Irish Agreement and offered to try to persuade both Government to have separate referendums in each jurisdiction which would, in effect, give the Irish people the opportunity to express their wishes for the future of the entire

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island. According to Fr Reid Hume also told Sinn Fein/PIRA that HMG was merely holding the ring and, through the Anglo-Irish Agreement, had declared its neutrality on the question of Northern Ireland.

4. Fr Reid went on to say that Sinn Fein/PIRA had not dismissed Hume's arguments but they had told him they would not deal through an intermediary and if such things are true they would need to hear them from HMG rather than have someone like Hume acting as interpreter. This did not imply that even if they accepted the position that they would necessarily give up their violence but Fr Reid stressed that in his opinion had some discussions taken place earlier we would not be in the position we were in now in relation to violence nor would they. At this point I told him that time was not on the side of Sinn Fein/PIRA, that they were losing popular support and resorting to outmoded and outdated rhetoric to justify killing people.

5. I went on to say that I was very sceptical when he talked about "a debate in that I, along with most people in Northern Ireland, regarded Sinn Fein/PIRA as a seamless robe but he responded by saying that there are two sides and that he wished that it was a seamless robe because in those circumstances there would be less difficulty about achieving a single agreed policy. He did agree there was dual membership in some cases and reminded me that Gerry Adams could be shot just as easily as anybody else.

6. He went on to say I had often told him that the men of violence had no mandate but he said that we should bear in mind Gerry Adams was an elected member of parliament and therefore had a mandate and in those circumstances there was no reason why we should not enter into dialogue with him - he also said he was sure that such things could be handled confidentially. I repeated that I was sure that such conversations could only take place if and when there was an end to the killing. In some frustration he replied saying that here again was the impasse, chicken and egg, that there was no way the Republican movement trusted the British Government and for me to advocate some of the things I was saying was tantamount to asking them to leap into the dark.

7. He then said that he understood that such discussions could not happen without a great deal of groundwork and asked me if he came to me with some points for clarification would I respond and when I put it to him bluntly that this seemed like him talking on someone else's behalf he demurred slightly and said "If I came to you as an individual and asked for some points to be clarified how would you respond". I told him I did not know and would have to think about it and at that point brought the meeting to an end. Fr Reid said he was going off for another few days but he would come back to me towards the end of next week when he was back in Northern Ireland.

Comment

8. Fr Reid has a history of being used as an intermediary by Sinn Fein/PIRA in the past (INLA feud, John Hume/Gerry Adams and between the UDA and PIRA) but as I reported before I am not sure whether he is acting as an individual trying to be a catalyst between the Republican movement and HMG or if he is speaking directly to Gerry Adams who is aware that he is making this contact. In either case I am reasonably sure that he is party to some of their discussions and I have maintained the line, as discussed earlier, that I should reinforce the Government's position about speaking to people who are in the business of murdering other people.

9. I now require some guidance as to my response when he next contacts me and I would be grateful for an opportunity to discuss these matters further.

(signed)

J E MCCONNELL

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