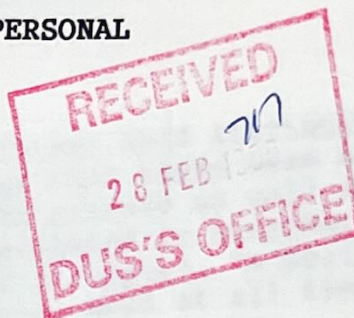


E.R.

SECRET and PERSONAL



FROM: J E McCONNELL
AS(PAB)

27 February 1990

cc PS/PUS (L&B) [3&4] - B
Mr Burns [5] - B
Mr Ledlie [6] - B
Mr Deverell [7] - B
Mr Daniell [8] - B

PS/SofS (L&B) [1&2] - B

DISCUSSION WITH FATHER REID

Father Reid suggested a meeting in a telephone call to my home on 22 February - I arranged to meet him in my office on Monday 26 February.

2. The meeting lasted about an hour and a half a good portion of which was taken up by a rerun of points which he has previously deployed in relation to the Republic movement. However there were some things which are worth recording even though they are variations of things he has said before.

- (i) Father Reid, without giving me any detail, confirmed he knew discussions were continuing between John Hume and Gerry Adams. From our conversation I gathered that part of their dialogue may be centred on some of the things which had been points of disagreements in their earlier discussions. Father Reid said they had agreed to make a list of those things on which they agreed and a list on which there were still difficulties "clearly there is more to be gained in discussing these points".
- (ii) One of the main talking points in the earlier discussions had been Sinn Fein's insistence that there be a British withdrawal or a declaration of intent to withdraw - Hume argued that such a proposition would lead to a Lebanon-type civil war in which, among other undesirable things, the RUC would join with the unionist community to fight the nationalists. Father Reid thinks that Hume has, in part, succeeded in convincing Adams of the "sense" of this argument and for that reason he believes that there has been less and less reference in speeches from Sinn Fein about "declaration to withdraw".

(iii) During our conversation Father Reid attributed various remarks to Mr Adams saying that there were now things which he said regularly in private as well as public such as - "Sinn Fein is prepared to consider alternatives to the armed struggle", "a political leader from a military organisation must at all times evince strength".

(iv) Father Reid then talked about a document which John Hume had given to Sinn Fein, at the time of the contact with Mr King, in which he argued that he could perhaps persuade the British Government to make a declaration of neutrality in return for which Sinn Fein would declare a ceasefire. The document was returned some weeks later, through Father Reid, with Adams saying that there was no way the Army Council would respond to such a low key statement in the way indicated.

(v) Father Reid went on to say that it was still his intention to try to create the circumstances where dialogue was possible though he is still pursuing another track ie attempting to get the Irish Government, Sinn Fein and SDLP to form a "Irish Peace Conference" under the chairmanship of the Irish Government which would invite all Irish politicians, including the Unionists, to work out a future for the island based on democracy and consent. He repeated, what he had told me before Christmas, that he had given copies of this proposition to Sinn Fein, (he assured me they were still thinking about the proposition) John Hume, (he has not pressed John Hume for an answer) and the Irish Government though, at a later point said that he had given John Hume the document for onward transmission (he thought to the DFA).

(vi) At this point Father Reid described a document he had prepared for Sinn Fein some four or five years ago which he had described as a draft outline ceasefire proposal the three main parts of which are as follows -

- (a) neither side would take advantage of the period of the ceasefire;
- (b) a group of intermediaries from the Catholic Church would monitor the ceasefire; and
- (c) discussions would start immediately about seeking an alternative to the arms struggle.

I think he mentioned this episode to point out that Adams is now saying he is willing to consider an alternative to the arms struggle which was point 3 of Father Reid's proposals four or five years ago.

3. Right at the end of the conversation, when we were discussing fairly mundane matters, Father Reid asked me how I would respond to an invitation from the Cardinal to meet him in Armagh if Gerry Adams was also present. He went on to say that secrecy could be maintained in such an exercise and that people like Adams never really took anyone seriously unless they were prepared to put their head above the "the parapet". I did not comment and Father Reid said he would ring me again on Sunday with a view to having a further discussion next week when "he might be more up-to-date with what's going on".

Conclusion

4. The last item came as a bolt out of the blue and I am reasonably sure, while Father Reid may have been thinking about it, that he was not the bearer of "a message", he is, in all probability, trying to press forward with his own ideas on the resolution of violence.

[signed]

J E McCONNELL
Ext 2238