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FROM: J R FISHER ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT 18 FEBRUARY 1997

JRF/35660/97/ET

ASST/ SEC 22012 20 FEB 1997 C.C.R.U.

- CC PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) - B
- PS/MICHAEL ANCRAM (B&L) - B
- PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/SIR DAVID FELL - B
- MR THOMAS - B
- MR STEELE - B
- MR BELL - B
- MR LEACH - B
- MR STEPHENS - B
- MR WATKINS - B
- MR BEETON - B
- MR BROOKER - B
- MR HILL - B
- MR BUCHANAN - B
- MR MACCABE - B
- MR PERRY - B
- MS BHARUCHA - B
- MS MAPSTONE - B
- HMA, DUBLIN - B
- MR LAMONT, RID - B

*1. in the long*  
*2. in the paper*  
*him*

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

IRISH SIDE MEET THE METHODISTS AT MARYFIELD

*Church file*

THE PRESIDENT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH (THE REV. KENNETH BEST), THE REV. HAROLD GOOD AND THE REV. WESLEY BLAIR HAD LUNCH AT THE SECRETARIAT ON 13 FEBRUARY. THE PRESIDENT TALKED ABOUT HIS ROLE LAST YEAR AT DRUMCREE (AND THE POLARISING EFFECT OF THAT EVENT) AND THE OUTLOOK, IN TERMS OF BOTH PARADES AND THE TALKS PROCESS. THE METHODISTS HAD HOPED TO TALK ABOUT WHAT WE DO AT MARYFIELD, BUT TIME RAN OUT.

DRUMCREE

2. THE PRESIDENT REGRETTED THAT HIS AND OTHER CHURCH LEADERS EFFORTS LAST YEAR HAD NOT SUCCEEDED. WHAT HE SAID WAS TINGED WITH A SENSE OF HAVING BEEN 'USED'. THE UUP LEADER HAD INVITED CHURCH LEADERS' INVOLVEMENT PERHAPS ONLY TO 'SIDE-STEP HIS OWN RESPONSIBILITIES'. MOREOVER THIS HAD BEEN FOLLOWED UP WITH A LETTER

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OF APPRECIATION TO ONLY ONE OF THE GROUP. ANY INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE THIS YEAR WOULD BE WILLINGLY ACCEPTED BY ALL FOUR LEADERS, BUT ONLY AGAINST A MORE DETAILED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF THEM. HE REGRETTED THAT 'CONCESSIONS' TO THE ORANGE ORDER IN THE LOWER ORMEAU ROAD (ALTHOUGH HE SAW AS 'QUESTIONABLE' THE RUC HAVING USED LAND ROVERS TO BOTTLE UP LOCAL RESIDENTS FOR SO LONG) HAD NOT FOUND RECIPROCATION ON THE ORANGE SIDE AT DRUMCREE. WHILST ACCEPTING THE CHIEF CONSTABLES'S DECISION AS THE ONLY PRACTICAL ONE (THE ALTERNATIVE WAS BULLETS), THE PRESIDENT WOULD HAVE PREFERRED THE SECRETARY OF STATE NOT TO HAVE GONE ON RECORD ADMITTING THAT IT WAS BECAUSE OF FORCE OF NUMBERS AND THE LIKELY COLLAPSE OF PUBLIC ORDER THAT THE PARADE HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO PROCEED. BUT THE REV. BEST DID NOT SAY HOW HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO SEE THE SITUATION HANDLED.

3. LED BY MR DONOGHUE, WHO SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT MR TRIMBLE WAS NOW TALKING TO LOCAL COUNCILLORS, THE PRESIDENT SAID HE WAS AWARE OF PRESENT EFFORTS AT NEGOTIATION AND MEDIATION, AND UNIONIST ANXIETY TO AVOID ANOTHER CONFRONTATION THIS YEAR. HE REMARKED THAT MOST OF THE LOCAL RESIDENTS GROUPS WHICH HAD SPRUNG UP LAST YEAR APPEARED TO HAVE FORMER PRISONERS AS THEIR LEADERS AND (WHILST NOT CONTRADICTING THAT THERE HAD ALWAYS BEEN FERTILE GROUND) RECOGNISED THE HAND OF SINN FEIN. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THE GARVAGHY ROAD RESIDENTS HAD MASTERED THE MEDIA WITH AN EFFECTIVE PR; LESS SO THE ORANGE ORDER WHO WERE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR CONSTITUENCY. THE INVOLVEMENT OF BRENDAN MCKENNA IN THE GARVAGHY ROAD RESIDENTS GROUP WAS A CONTINUING OBSTACLE. AS TO THE NORTH REPORT, THE PRESIDENT INDICATED THAT THE THRUST OF THE CHURCH'S EVIDENCE TO THE REVIEW HAD BEEN TO STRESS THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE. HE WOULD NOT BE DRAWN ON WHAT VIEW THE CHURCH WOULD BE PUTTING FORWARD TO THE PRESENT 'CONSULTATION ON CONSULTATION' PROCESS ON NORTH, NOR ON WHETHER THE METHODIST CHURCH WOULD HAVE AN INTEREST IN ONE OF ITS MEMBERS SITTING ON THE PROPOSED COMMISSION. HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENT DID NOT SEE THE BODY ITSELF AS PROVIDING THE SOLUTION, MEDIATION AND AGREEMENT WAS WHAT WOULD BE NEEDED. EVEN THEN, AGREEMENT REACHED BETWEEN LOCAL LEADERS WOULD NOT SUCCEED IF THEY WERE UNABLE TO CARRY WITH THEM THEIR SUPPORTERS. THOSE INVOLVED (AS NOW AT HARRYVILLE)

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WAS NOT EXACTLY THOSE 'WHO WERE PUTTING MONEY IN THE POCKETS' OF THE METHODIST CHURCH. AND, LIKE IT OR NOT, LEADERS OFTEN FELT IT NECESSARY TO LEAD EVEN AGAINST THEIR BEST JUDGEMENT.

4. LED BY THE IRISH SIDE WHO FELT THAT 'DRUMCREE HAD POISONED THE WELLS', THE PRESIDENT SPOKE OF THE DEEP INSECURITY FELT AMONGST LOYALISTS, THE LEGITIMACY OF THEIR GRIEVANCES AND A FEAR OF THEIR POSITION HAVING BEEN STEADILY ERODED OVER THE PAST DECADE. BUT THERE WERE SURPRISES WHEN (ESPECIALLY FOR A PORTADOWN MAN) THE LONDONDERRY APPRENTICE BOYS HAD SHOWN SUCH WILLINGNESS IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE BOGSIDE RESIDENTS GROUP. IAN PAISLEY (WHOSE 'POLICY WAS DRIVEN BY HIS THEOLOGY') REPRESENTED A 'STRONG VOICE'. IT WAS ONE WHICH (AS MR TRIMBLE RIGHTLY FEARED) WOULD CAPTURE SUPPORT AT TIMES WHEN THE PROTESTANT COMMUNITY FELT THREATENED. HE WAS SEEN AS THE ONE PERSON WHO WOULD NOT COMPROMISE.

5. AS TO THE LOYALIST CEASEFIRE, THE PRESIDENT WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT THIS WOULD HOLD; HE WAS USING HIS INFLUENCE TO THAT END. HOWEVER, GIVEN FURTHER ATROCITIES, THE METHODISTS COULD COME UNDER SUCH PRESSURE THAT THEIR OWN CONTACTS WITH SINN FEIN WOULD NEED TO BE BROUGHT TO AN END. FOR THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, THE CHURCH HAD AN 'OPEN DOOR' POLICY TOWARDS SUCH CONTACTS CONTINUING, AND THE REV. BEST REPORTED THAT THOSE WHO IN HIS CHURCH HAD DEALT WITH SINN FEIN HAD FOUND THEM "GENUINE".

6. FINALLY, OF THE TALKS PROCESS, THE REV. BLAIR ASKED WHETHER IT WAS NAIVE OF THE METHODISTS TO VIEW BOTH GOVERNMENTS' POSITION AS BEING COMMITTED TO AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS BUT THAT, IF THIS COULD NOT BE ACHIEVED (AND BOTH GOVERNMENTS HAD DEMONSTRABLY MADE EVERY REASONABLE EFFORT), THEY WOULD 'THROW THEIR HANDS IN THE AIR', DECLARE THEMSELVES FREE FROM ANY BLAME, LAYING THIS AT THE DOOR OF SINN FEIN? BOTH MR DONOGHUE AND MR BELL EMPHASISED THE DEGREE OF AGREEMENT AND COOPERATION THERE WAS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. ALTHOUGH THE METHODISTS, REFERRING TO MR HUME'S EFFORTS ("COMMON CURRENCY" IN LONDONDERRY) TO ACT AS A REASONABLE GO-BETWEEN, BETWEEN SINN FEIN AND HMG, SEEMED INCLINED IF NOT TO BLAME HMG FOR WASTING AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY, NEVERTHELESS TO WANT REASSURANCE THAT THIS

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W. NOT SO. MR BELL ACCORDINGLY EXPLAINED, AT LENGTH BUT IN STANDARD TERMS, HMG'S DESIRE FOR SINN FEIN TO ENTER AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS BUT THAT THEIR ENTRY WOULD NOT BE A MATTER OF MEETING AN ARBITRARY PROBATIONARY PERIOD BUT DEMONSTRABLY DELIVERING AN UNEQUIVOCAL CEASEFIRE UNDER THE TERMS OF THE ENTRY TO NEGOTIATIONS ACT. IN DISCUSSION, THE METHODISTS FELT THAT SINN FEIN WOULD NOT ENTER THE TALKS WITHOUT SOME CERTAINTY OF ACHIEVING THEIR OBJECTIVES ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PARTICIPATING PARTIES DID NOT LEAVE AN IMPRESSION OF ACTING SERIOUSLY. ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENT WAS CERTAIN OF THE DESIRE FOR PEACE AND TO ENTER INTO THE TALKS BY THOSE IN SINN FEIN HE HAD TALKED TO, IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT THEY WOULD DECOMMISSION AHEAD OF ENTRY (WHICH WAS NOT, IT WAS POINTED OUT, WHAT HMG WERE SEEKING). AT LEAST ONE OF THE METHODIST MINISTERS (AND THE IRISH SIDE) FELT THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE A PROCESS WITHOUT SINN FEIN PRESENT. CONTINUING, MR DONOGHUE FELT THAT ONCE IN THE TALKS, SINN FEIN WOULD COME TO ACCEPT THEIR DEMOCRATIC OUTCOME WITH A SETTLEMENT BASED ON THE FRAMEWORKS DOCUMENT. SINN FEIN HAD ALREADY INDICATED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO SIGN UP TO THE MITCHELL PRINCIPLES AND EVENTUALLY THERE WOULD BE VERY LITTLE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE POLICIES OF SINN FEIN AND THE SDLP, (A STATEMENT NOT OFTEN HEARD QUITE SO OPENLY EXPRESSED BY THE IRISH SIDE.) THOSE PRESENT AGREED THAT THE SHOOTING OF LANCE BOMBARDIER RESTORICK WAS WITHOUT LOGIC AND DOING CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE TO SINN FEIN'S IMAGE ABROAD.

7. THE LUNCH ENDED WITH THE PRESIDENT PUTTING ON RECORD HIS APPRECIATION OF RECENT HELPFUL STATEMENTS MADE BY THE TAOISEACH, ADDING THAT NO ONE WANTED BOMBS IN DUBLIN OR MONAGHAN.

8 THE METHODISTS EMPHASISED THROUGHOUT THAT THEY WERE AN ALL-IRELAND CHURCH, AND WHETHER FROM POLICY OR CONVICTION, CAME ACROSS AS MARKEDLY LESS UNIONIST IN ORIENTATION THAN THE PRESBYTERIANS ON THEIR LAST VISIT TO MARYFIELD.

SIGNED

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