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PAB/5598/RN

FROM: J E MCCONNELL
DATE: 27 NOVEMBER 1989



PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

cc PS/Minister of State (B&L) - B
PS/Dr Mawhinney (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Burns - B
Mr Miles - B
Mr Spence - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr A Wilson - B
Mr Blackwell - B
Mr Daniell - B
Mr Kirk - B
Mr Masefield - B

CARDINAL O FIAICH

1. As has been extensively reported in this morning's local media, Cardinal O Fiaich has urged HMG to declare publicly that it will not stay in Northern Ireland "for all time". He went on to say that a British indication of eventual withdrawal would "put it up to the Ulster unionists to work out a relationship with the rest of the people in this country" and that the only solution to the situation in NI lay in some form of unity between North and South.

2. These remarks have made both the unionist parties furious. For the UUP, Mr Molyneaux has said that they show the "unacceptable face of Irish nationalism" and (in a slight and possibly deliberate misinterpretation of what was actually said) that the Cardinal's demand for the setting of a date for the withdrawal of British citizenship from the people of Northern Ireland was "a blatant denial of the right of self-determination". John Taylor, who only last week was responding positively to the idea that unionists might

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talk to the Irish Government, has called the Cardinal's remarks "one of the most obscene and politically insensitive statements of recent years" and has accused him of moving closer to the stated position of Sinn Fein.

3. This sentiment was also expressed yesterday by Dr Paisley for the DUP. He accused the Cardinal of having the same objective as the Provisional IRA and went on to say that the Roman Catholic Church, the IRA, the SDLP and the Irish Government were at one in wishing to bring about a united Ireland. On the local radio news this morning, Sammy Wilson, the DUP press spokesman, described the Roman Catholic Church as "the ecclesiastical wing of the IRA".

4. The Alliance Party too have been highly critical, calling the Cardinal's suggestion "immoral" and, if put into effect, likely to lead to civil war. Only the SDLP have declined to be drawn.

Comment

5. Though Cardinal O Fiaich's remarks were made on a closed circuit hospital interview he should have known they would be widely reported. They may have been intended to be helpful but they have had precisely the reverse effect. Comments like these can all too easily destroy the fragile signs of increased flexibility on the part of some elements of unionism. It is very hard for unionist leaders to be courageous and positive against this sort of background.

(Signed R Neill for)

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