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Unreply ~~26/11~~
54/91

FROM: P JOHNSTON
PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER
24 NOVEMBER 1993

ASST SEC 432/11
29 NOV 1993
CENT MSW SEC

HEAD OF THE H.A.
1500
24 NOV 1993
CIVIL SERVICE

*In the letter
I find the last para.
most surprising.
26.11*

- cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
- PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Marsh - B
- Mr McVeigh - B
- Mr Speirs - B

1079/11
26 NOV 1993
Mr Watkins
for file
Dee
24/11

MR PERRY - B

SIR JOHN WHEELER'S MEETING WITH REVEREND WILLIAM BINGHAM AT THE DELEGATION FROM THE PRESBYTERY OF TYRONE

The Minister received a delegation from the Presbytery of Tyrone on 22 November to discuss security concerns. Attending the meeting were The Reverend Bingham, The Reverend Norman Brown, The Reverend Jim McCormick, The Reverend Brian Cruise and The Reverend Ivor Smith. The former Moderator, Dr Godfrey Brown, also attended. Official support was given by yourself and Mr McVeigh.

2. The former Moderator, Dr Godfrey Brown opened for the delegation by explaining the background to the meeting - most meetings with Government were normally organised through the Church but in this case The Reverend Bingham had written to the Prime Minister asking him to visit Tyrone. Dr Brown explained that the delegation had not come with a shopping list of demands, rather it wanted to convey to those in Government the feelings of their threatened and isolated community.

3. The Reverend Bingham emphasised that the fear felt by the Reverend gentlemen's communities was no reflection on the work of

CONFIDENTIAL

WHEELER/392

the security forces in the area. On the contrary, they were greatly impressed by the tremendous work carried out by the Police and Army. The Minister strongly concurred with the Reverend Bingham's assessment and said he would be pleased to pass on the message of appreciation to the security forces. (SPOB1 to provided draft).

4. The Reverend Bingham described his own Parish of Pomeroy - a small community which had suffered greatly during the period. Within his area there had been 12 fatalities and he claimed that a common profile could be drawn up of the victims - young men in their late 20s or early 30s, farmers who were about to inherit land, part-time members of the security forces, engaged to be married and planning to set up home in the area. This left the isolated Protestant community feeling that it was PIRA's intention to drive them out of the area and to put pressure on young Protestant families through actual violence or by threat of it. The Reverend Bingham said that his congregation felt that they were paying a price for their "Britishness" and there was a feeling that people in Government do not really understand the pressures which living a life under threat put families under. The Rev Bingham's heartfelt assessment was that the Presbyterian community in the area needed reassurance.

5. The Reverend Brian Cruise from Kildress highlighted the PIRA attack on one of his parishoners on the previous evening. He was also concerned that PIRA's idea of legitimate targets had widened well beyond the security forces. The Reverend Cruise sensed a feeling that Government officials were more reactive than pro-active in their defence of the Tyrone community - there was a desperate feeling that the agenda was being set by others.

6. The Reverend Ivor Smith said that the last few years had been intense and he had lost 2 parishoners. He repeated the views of the other members of the delegation that the feeling of fear was forcing


CONFIDENTIAL

people out of the area. The Reverend Smith reiterated the delegations view that great reassurance had been given by the activity of the security forces including the very significant finds and arrests. However, such is the climate of fear in the area that the community can see danger in periods of quiet, because they believe that resources will be redeployed and then PIRA retarget the area.

7. The Reverend Norman Brown said that things were not as intense in his South Derry congregation but the community still feel isolated. One young man, who was about to inherit a farm and had intended to build in the area, had been shot. There is also the fear of targeting; the Rev Brown explained that the Church was taking precautions because it is feared that the building is being targeted; apparently, cars have driven up outside the Church over the past few months and the RUC had confirmed that they belonged to known Republicans. The Rev Brown noted the importance of helicopter cover which he considered a vital form of reassurance. [The Minister had met a delegation from Cloghoge, little over an hour earlier, who were deeply critical of helicopters].

8. The Reverend Jim McCormick made an impassioned plea regarding the isolation felt by his congregation. He said that some of his congregation have seen cars outside their house and know they are being targeted but have been told by the Police that there is nothing they can do about it. The general feeling of his community is "Who really cares?" - they feel unwanted and the media contribute to their feeling that they are regarded as a burden on the British tax payer.

9. The Minister said that he appreciated the delegation coming to convey the personal feelings of their community. Sir John could empathise with their congregations since he represents the centre of



CONFIDENTIAL

WHEELER/392

London (which had suffered from terrorism) and he understands what it is like to have your family worried about opening the front door and having to check under the car for booby traps.

10. Turning to the question of "Does anyone care?". The Minister emphatically stated that all citizens of the United Kingdom have equal rights wherever they are in the UK and that the Government never surrenders its interests in its citizens. With regard to direction of security policy, the Minister said that, while there are no panaceas, he has clear objectives in his mind (reinforced by his frequent visits to security force bases) about the direction of security policy. He is greatly reassured by the remarkably high standards of the security forces. Although the Minister understood that it was difficult for a family under threat to see the progress that was being made, he could point to the statistics; people are being arrested and there have been over 300 people charged with terrorist offences this year. Furthermore, many operations are disrupted but successes do not get picked up by the media who are only interested in reporting serious incidents.

11. "What can be done?" The Minister said that quite a lot could be done, often in unglamorous areas such as improved information technology for the RUC so they can exploit the intelligence they have to the full. In addition, the Government give support to other services which are absolutely vital to the fight against terrorism eg NIFSL. The Minister also intends to continue his listening process by visiting the security forces and hearing from those who know best about the local situation. It was explained that the Government also looks at the law to see that it is as effective as possible (but also that it maintains the moral high ground) so that the defeat of terrorism can be achieved from the basis of credibility.

12. On the political side, the Minister pointed out that both the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach had recognised that there could be no progress without the wholehearted support of a majority of the citizens of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately cheap speculation by

the media had caused anxiety. The Minister said that the delegation could be reassured that Northern Ireland was safe in the Prime Minister's hands; there was no question of abandoning any citizens and there was no acceptable level of violence. The Minister said, in answering a query from the Rev Bingham, that the Office would look into the possibility of meeting local people while he was on a visit to security forces in the area [SPOB1 to note]. The Minister concluded by saying that his message to the Reverend gentlemen's communities was that he had a personal understanding of their circumstances, that the Government was doing its utmost to ensure that the security forces were given every support to do the job they carry out so excellently and that citizens of the UK will not under any circumstances be abandoned.

13. The delegation was very appreciative of the Minister taking time to see them and they appeared genuinely to take comfort from the reassurances which they received.

SIGNED

Paul A Johnston
PS/Sir John Wheeler
OAB Ext 6498
24 November 1993