

RESTRICTED

From: Allen McVeigh
Political Affairs Division
18 July 1997

ASST./
SEC 22917
21 JUL 1997
C.C.R.U.

cc Mr Thomas - O
Mr Steele - O
Mr Stephens - O
Mr Leach o/r - O
Mr Bell - O
Mr Watkins - O
Mr Maccabe o/r
Mr Perry - O
Mr Hill - O
Mr Brooker - O
Mr Crawford o/r

1. De McCloy
- How is Ed Cairns' work on
Tina Cairns, etc. going along?
2. Ken McCann
Di. 24/7
21/7

McVeigh
21/7

Mr Beeton - O

BLOODY SUNDAY: BOGSIDE RESIDENTS LISTEN TO A PROTESTANT VIEWPOINT ON 14 JULY

The Pat Finucane Centre's debate in the Bogside on Bloody Sunday - foreshadowed in my minute (not to all) of 4 July - took place on 14 July. The DUP's Gregory Campbell, Derry UUP Councillor Andrew Davidson and Alwyn Thompson, ECONI's Research Officer shared a platform, providing a Protestant perspective on this emotive subject for Nationalists.

2. Tuesday night's Belfast Telegraph and today's Newsletter carried reports of this encounter, concentrating, perhaps not unexpectedly, on remarks attributed to Gregory Campbell (copies - to you only - being forwarded separately). The reports, incidentally, were not included in the daily press clippings. Local reporters were present in some strength, though I have not yet seen any localised articles.

3. I spoke earlier to Alwyn Thompson and asked him for his view of how the event had gone. He first told me the Orange Order decision to re-route, etc had dramatically changed the atmosphere for this particular meeting and had helped

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

reduce his own apprehension about venturing into the area in mid-July. A crowd of around 150 had been present, among them many of the Bloody Sunday relatives and members of Sinn Fein, including Mitchell McLaughlin. He did not think the Telegraph article a particularly good report of the event and suspected it was written up on the basis of a pre-event interview with Campbell (who, according to the subsequent Newsletter report, also thought his remarks had been quoted out of context).

4. Alwyn considered Campbell's attitude to Bloody Sunday to have mellowed somewhat, although he gave an honest, blunt assessment which tended to focus on the past and ignored the fact that Bloody Sunday remained very much a current issue for Nationalists. He also thought Campbell over-focused on his assertion that the alienation felt by Catholics in the 70s had transferred to Protestants in the 90s, and that the gulf between the two communities meant they could not begin to understand or share their feelings of hurt and pain with each other. Davidson was dismissed as rambling and simply "awful", and Alwyn was too modest to detail his own presentation. In summary, he felt the issue of Bloody Sunday was an internal debate localised within Derry with only peripheral interest elsewhere, though he accepts others would beg to differ.

5. On the audience, Alwyn said there were many different components of the Bloody Sunday campaign present. Many were not sure what they wanted and there appeared to him to be no clear policy. He mentioned the perception of many Protestants that the campaign was yet another Sinn Fein front. McLaughlin had disappointed Alwyn by trotting out the usual SF line that Bloody Sunday demonstrated to Nationalists that they could expect no justice from the Brits. Alwyn had asked the audience members what it was they wanted? The campaign chairman, whose brother had been killed, said they wanted an enquiry - they were unclear though on what that should entail and what to do if it didn't produce the result they sought - and following that they wanted an apology. After further questioning, he was quite clear that an apology was not being sought at this stage.

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

6. I thanked him for providing me with an insight on what he said was regarded generally by those present as a worthwhile occasion. So much so that after the event he was approached and asked if ECONI would consider hosting an opportunity to air the issue in Belfast. Due to other commitments, it is unlikely this could be undertaken until January, but is under active consideration by ECONI. He undertook to let me know the outcome, but I imagine it will get the go ahead.

(**Comment:** While I did not mention this to Alwyn Thompson, it may be worth considering whether or not that occasion might present an opportunity for HMG to publicly explain its position on Bloody Sunday. You might, however, want to await developments over the next few months before coming to a decision for or against the idea.)

(Signed)

-
A McVEIGH
SH Ext 27089

RESTRICTED