



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

PA

PA REPTS
FROM FACT

28 March, 1994

Confidential

Mr Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

cc PST
PSS
Mr Attorney
Mr T Dalton
Amb Small
OK
29/3

Dear Assistant Secretary

John Fee

John Fee has been well known to me since he first entered Seamus Mallon's office some eight years ago. I called at his home today en route to Belfast to see how he was. The visit was informal and personal but there are a few points worth reporting.

John Fee's injuries have turned out to be less than originally reported. He has severe bruising and lacerations, broken ribs, a chipped ankle (not a broken leg) and hairline fractures of the fingers of one hand. He is on pain killers but is alert and dealing with a stream of messages, callers to the house and media requests for interviews. For the moment, he is taking Seamus Mallon's counsel to avoid giving further interviews (he gave an interview from his hospital bed last Friday which was widely carried here and abroad).

He and Mallon are angry with Hume for appearing non-committal on the charge that the attack was organised and conducted by the IRA. Hume visited him last evening and was given a full briefing on Thursday's events and local reactions. He telephoned today, promising to telephone again later before taking a flight. He told Fee he would be quoted in tomorrow's newspapers as backing Fee's account of IRA involvement in the incident, but Fee is doubtful that he will in fact do so. *

The men who beat him last Thursday night waited until his sister and brother had left the house, then closed the driveway gates and set upon him when he got out of his car to open them. He recalls three assailants; the RUC have told him that fingerprints taken at the scene show evidence of two more. The lights of his car which were on at the time were turned off and the keys taken, which worries him; his car is known and if others have access to it, he fears it could be used in an operation as a "safe car"; he proposes to sell it.

* PS: Hume has been as good as his word, see today's Irish Times, 29.3.94.

Fee said the attack was conducted by the local Crossmaglen IRA, not by mavericks or outsiders and he is angry with suggestions by republicans and indeed by his own party colleague in the area, Pat Toner, that the IRA were not involved and that the British might have been. The men who attacked him, set up the scene at his gate, wore paramilitary gear with balaclavas or baseball caps, were silent throughout and were careful to avoid injuring his face, or otherwise damaging him too severely. He did not recognise them. It was dark and he does not remember beyond the initial blows. But apart from the manner of the assault, he does know that locals reported seeing a car load of local Provos outside his girlfriend's house as well as other well known local players outside the pub he was about to visit. These two places and his home were the three places Fee would have been found that evening. The IRA activity suggested to locals that an operation was afoot; they presumed at the time it was directed against the Army. They have had no compunction in saying to the family, even if not publicly, they know the IRA were responsible. One such call was from Martin McAllister, nephew of the Sinn Fein Councillor Pat McAllister, who issued the local Sinn Fein disclaimer. McAllister junior was involved in the 1970's and served time. He telephoned the following morning to say that his uncle's denial was rubbish.

Fee thinks the attack was due to more than his criticism of the IRA's recent mortar attack on the local barracks which hit a helicopter and might have caused civilian casualties. He has made a number of such statements before. Why attack him this time? He thinks the hard men may be trying to stem local support for the Declaration. When the Declaration was issued, the immediate reaction of republican supporters in the area was critical (Fee mentioned some names). As time went on, however, it grew favourable, as media visitors to the area were able to see for themselves in January and February. A difference of opinion - not a split as Fee was careful to say - now exists between local ASUs and republican supporters (comment: this accords with some other indications of the development of republican opinion in South Armagh.) Among the more interesting straws in the wind, not just in South Armagh, but in other republican areas, is the amount of Provo money coming out of the wordwork, as Fee put it. In Crossmaglen, a local Provo family has applied for planning permission to build a large hotel, an unusual move to say the least in Cross; certainly a move anticipating better times.

Fee worries about Hume's political judgement. He thinks Hume's apparent public faith in Adams is estranging him more and more from the SDLP rank and file and weakening his and the party's standing. This waiting for Adams could not go on forever.* At one point, he said that if Mallon decided to confront Hume, Hendron and McGrady would join him and so would most of the party. On the other hand, while he believes Adams cannot deliver, at least for now, he recognises that Hume must speak the language of hope; and at a deeper level, he agrees with Hume that there will never be peace until the republicans

* Fee added that he thought there was little or no chance of a favourable response this Easter.

are brought into the political process. As he sees it, the extreme elements are not prepared to be brought in at present, indeed are determined to show that a United Ireland, when it comes, will be to their credit, not to anyone else's. There is, therefore, a dilemma which he recognises; and he will not make trouble for Hume. He does feel, however, that after this experience, Hume owes him the reciprocal duty to say publicly that he accepts the local party's account of who was responsible. Would he hesitate in the face of a similar account from Mark Durkan in Derry? Can he seriously expect to continue to ignore Adams' attacks on Mallon as unpatriotic and disloyal to his party leader, while taking Adams' side with the British Government?

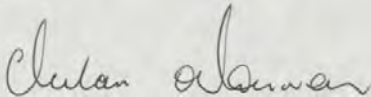
Fee mentioned lastly that he has received hundreds of messages from the Protestant community, and visits from Archbishop Eames and the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church.

He plans to go away for a break in a couple of days by which time he hopes that Hume will have backed him up.

Comment

Behind the feeling that Hume's dialogue with Adams has placed enormous strain on his party activists, there remains a great respect for Hume and his strategy and a desire to avoid doing his efforts harm. But there is also, and separately, a plain feeling that in circumstances like these, Hume should take the side of his own men and not appear by silence to give credence to the statements of Adams and co. As Fee put it, if Hume won't speak out there will be plenty of scared people around who will be relieved to follow his example as shown in Gerry Moriarty's account of local views, or rather local silence, in today's Irish Times.

Yours sincerely



Declan O'Donovan
Joint Secretary