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Reference Code: 2021/96/39

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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH
BÉALFEIRSTE

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ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT
BELFAST

12 October, 1994

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

hw helen
hw brian
Jhr
13/10/94

PST
PSS
~~Mr F Murray~~
Dr N Marshall
Mr T Dalton
Amb Gordon T
Washington
Box

Dear Assistant Secretary

John Steele, Assistant Under-Secretary, currently in charge of security matters in the NIO came to lunch here yesterday with the Joint Secretary and myself. Steele is due to retire in 3 years time. His background is in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. He has been Director of the Court Service and Controller of the Prison Service in N.I. He is the first member of the NICS to hold his present post. Prior to this the post was always held by people from the British Civil Service. We found him sympathetic on a personal level to our views, as indeed we have in the past.

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His view of the NIO was that it was excessively compartmentalised and this worked to the detriment of the free-flow of information in the Office. We asked him if he thought there were people in the NICS who could replace him. He said there were very good people in the NICS but they were not always picked for assignment to the NIO. This, of course, was for decision by the Head of the NICS.

He left after lunch to attend a regular joint meeting with the RUC and Army.

On likely events post the Conservative Party Conference, he said these would be determined by No. 10. However, the NIO was conscious of the fact that Adams and his supporter were the best that were likely to emerge from Sinn Fein with whom the British Government could do business. In this general context we said that it appeared to us, and indeed to others, that there was a bloody mindedness in the British system which seemed to oppose Adams and his supporters at every opportunity. He said he was aware of this and of the possibility that Adams and Maginnis could be found at some future stage "in the boot of a car with bullets in the back of their heads."

Nevertheless, he was optimistic about the present situation.

The following specific points may be of interest:-

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1. Early release of prisoners: Steele acknowledged that the Secretary of State has a personal antipathy toward the early release of paramilitary prisoners and is conscious also of the similar attitude among some of his Tory backbenchers. Steele had made the point to the Secretary of State that it had always proved possible to "empty the gaols" and instanced the case of Joe Cahill who had been released after serving only 5 years of a life sentence. The Secretary of State, he said, "looked at me with distaste."

Steele thought that a way forward on this issue might be to use the Royal Prerogative as was done frequently at present in cases of compassionate parole and in "fringe" cases (these are cases where a prisoner on parole is approaching the end of his sentence and the parole period would not extend to the end of the sentence, then the balance of the sentence may be remitted by order of the Secretary of State so that the prisoner does not have to return to prison). All prisoners in N.I. would be aware of these powers. [Note: The Secretary of State referring to early releases told us at the last IGC that the Royal Prerogative was rarely used; on average about once in a decade!]. Additionally the English system might be introduced in N.I. This would entail setting up a Parole Board in N.I. which would be entitled to look at any sentence once 1/3 of the sentence had been served and grant parole at any stage after that.

their point should be retained for any comparison of British & NI regimes.

On loyalist paramilitary prisoners, he felt that they would declare a ceasefire eventually, indeed sooner rather than later. He was aware of the meetings which took place last Monday in the Maze Prison between loyalist prisoners and representatives of their organisations from outside the prison. He said Adair (UDA) was a negative influence on the prisoners but he understood the UDA were trying to limit that influence. However, he had no information on the outcome of the meetings.

2. The RUC: Steele himself raised the question of the future policing of N.I. He thought the main problem was how to attract Catholics into any future N.I. Police Force. This problem would be compounded in a situation where the size of the present Force would be reducing - assuming there was total peace. There was 8,500 RUC members at present plus 3,500 full-time reservists. The age profile of the present Force would indicate that the average age was low and they had been recruiting up to very recently. They were looking around for ideas on how to tackle this problem. The loss of earnings and, indeed, of jobs in the security area would be a big problem: already people were re-scheduling their mortgages as overtime was reducing significantly. He thought an appropriate name for a new Force might be "Ulster Police Service (UPS)" - a name which, in his view, would be quite acceptable to the Unionist side.

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Fr Denis Faul is in regular contact with him about various issues. He regards Fr Faul very highly and adopted wholly Fr Faul's dismissal of the idea of a special local Catholic/Nationalist Police Force to police certain areas: this would merely be replacing one Force of "Specials" with another.

He didn't see a successor to the late Deputy Chief Constable, Ken Masterson, being appointed for at least another few months. He could think of a half-dozen candidates from throughout the U.K. who would be suitable. The name Ronnie Flanagan, current Assistant Chief Constable in charge of the Special Branch, was mentioned.

3. Arms: Steele said he could not see the IRA handing up all their arms, certainly not while the other paramilitary groupings had access to arms. This would be a matter for discussion in the exploratory talks. Ultimately, the IRA might hand in their arms to the authorities in the South and the loyalist paramilitaries to the British authorities. We said that from our point of view the prospect of caches of arms being left out there would be less than encouraging.
4. Attack on Seamus Hurl by members of RIR: Steele said he knew nothing of Hurl himself. However, he had seen some statements relating to the incident. The RUC were taking a very serious view of it and very likely there would be criminal charges arising from it. In this case there was empirical evidence - in the form of medical reports from the hospital where Hurl had been treated afterwards. A file was being prepared for the D.P.F.
5. Deployment of Royal Marines in South Armagh/Paras in West Belfast: On the deployment of troops generally, Steele said that decisions on deployment were taken and movements planned a long time before the troops actually appeared in an area. Such decisions were extremely difficult to change. The British Army would never publicly acknowledge that particular regiments were tainted. The way to avoid trouble with particular regiments was to ensure that Commanding Officers were fully versed in the situation with which their soldiers had to deal and were enforcing strict discipline. We said we hoped the CO of the Marines was one such officer. Steele said there were more complaints about the RUC in Armagh than about the Marines.

There was a Sinn Fein parade/protest scheduled for Crosemaglen next Sunday. Steele said he would talk to the Civil Representative in the area about the security forces' response to it. While the Civil Rep didn't have jurisdiction over the RUC, he did have considerable influence with them.

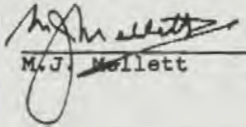
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It may be that the Royal Marines can stand back and let the RUC police the situation as they had done in Crossmaglen during "Operation Rectify".

6. Judicial Appointment: Steele described the present system of selecting judges in N.I. as ludicrous. He would favour an Independent Commission for this purpose.
7. Monitoring of Ceasefire: Steele agreed to meet us on a regular basis about this. He would hope to be able to brief us as fully as possible.

Yours sincerely


M.J. Mellett