

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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SECRET

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MEETING WITH FR. ALEX REID

Fr. Reid came to see me at his request, partly to convey the same message already passed to Dermot Gallagher, and reported verbatim by him on 20 August 1999. The substance of the message had also been passed on by him in the meantime to Mo Mowlam and David Trimble.

He said that the IRA's hold on its own organisation was becoming tenuous in current circumstances. They had never said (re Charlie Bennett) that they would not take the steps necessary to maintain the cohesion of the organisation. He also pointed out that in the Mitchell Report 'punishment' killings and beatings had been put in a separate category (principle f 'To urge that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop and to take effective steps to prevent such actions', but also para. 11 'Notwithstanding reprehensible 'punishment' killings and beatings, the sustained observance of the ceasefires should not be devalued'). The latter draws or certainly strongly implies an important distinction between the ceasefires (which excludes these acts) and commitment and adherence to the fundamental principles of democracy (which includes these acts). Fr. Reid strongly argued that, if the reform of policing were carried through, the IRA would not want to continue these actions which were distaseful to most of them, to maintain a hold on their community.

I pointed out that such actions, including the attempted importation of arms, was putting considerable strain on the situation, and was working to the

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advantage of Unionism, which had borne the principal blame for the lack of a breakthrough in July.

He said he had seen Gerry Adams yesterday, and had found him in very indifferent shape, despite 2 weeks' holiday. He felt he was depressed and feared the process was doomed.

Fr. Reid had also met Trimble a week ago, who had told him that the position put by Sinn Féin to them end June/early July was hopeless. Trimble said private assurances to him personally would be of no value. He felt the review would fail. He was a 'gradualist', but declined to define what that might mean in concrete terms, as people might prematurely dismiss it as not enough. He thought some procedural changes might be made, which would allow the Assembly to meet and improve relations. While Fr. Reid felt these statements represented signs of progress, I expressed scepticism. Unionists of all shades were attached to the Assembly on its own, and 'gradualism' (an example of which was not forming the shadow executive) was another word for procrastination.

When Fr. Reid met Mowlam last week, she showed much understanding of the situation, but said, if there was another killing in the next fortnight, she was "f - d".

He made the point that the leadership of Adams and McGuinness had already been damaged by what had happened. He again put forward the notion that arms could be 'dumped', and I asked him what specific action, if any, other than maintaining the present status quo, that would involve. His initial

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response was that it meant even more restricted access to dumps by very few personnel.

I stressed over and over again that the whole purpose of procrastination was to push the Republican Movement into error, and that if they gave way to their frustration it would hand the victory to the Unionists.

He said they felt there was a clear attempt by the security forces to win military advantage by planting listening devices, increased surveillance etc. He said the process was surviving 'by the grace of God', but that there was no guarantee that someone might not be provoked into doing something foolish.

1 September 1999

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