

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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PSM
PSMR
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SO Baltic
Dr Kearney.

21P

Mr Lee Quarmby/pmg
29/8/2000

SECRET

Conversation with Archbishop Seán Brady, 1 August, 2000

Mr. Whelan
Noted, thanks.
The stand-off over Patten will be hard to surmount.
25/8/00
(On return from A-C).

I met with Archbishop Brady in Armagh to discuss policing.

The present police force is not acceptable to Catholics and there must be a new beginning. If this happened he would hope to permit the Police Service to recruit in Catholic schools. He is very disappointed with the Bill as it emerged from the Commons. Soundings from priests and school principals have been negative. He fears that the phrase "incorporating the RUC" will significantly inhibit young Catholics from joining the police service. In their conversations with Patten and with the British Government, the Catholic Bishops have stressed the symbolic importance of a new name underlining a new beginning. He was also concerned about the use of the Union flag and about the emblem.

The Bill as it stands gives too much power to the Secretary of State and to the Chief Constable vis a vis the Police Board and the Ombudsman. He gave me a letter from the Chairman of the current Police Authority expressing concern at the British Government's position on police planning, financial accountability and inquiry powers. He said the incoming Ombudsperson, Ms O'Loan, is coming to see him and still has some problems with the Bill.

He has met with Martin McGuinness, Seamus Mallon and Peter Mandelson in recent weeks. McGuinness convinced him that Sinn Féin wants a police service that they can support. The meeting with Mandelson was very difficult. Mandelson complained of a pan-nationalist front driven by Sinn Féin concerns and asked why could the Archbishop not come out now and support the Bill. He seemed almost obsessed with

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a need to support Trimble. Mandelson said to him that more than one third of current applications for the RUC are Catholic, which the Archbishop doubted. The Archbishop described him as an extremely touchy and difficult person and doesn't feel that he got through to him. He said he was considering writing to Blair asking for a meeting, which I encouraged.

He referred to meetings he has had with the unionists on the Police Bill when he found them reasonably receptive to his concerns. He also mentioned that he had developed a reasonable relationship with Trimble ever since he had accepted an invitation from the latter to a unionist party function. I suggested to him that it might be useful for him to meet with Trimble, or if not with his other unionist contacts, to explain nationalist concerns, particularly on the name of the new police service. He said he would consider this.

He hoped the British Government would be able to accept further amendments both on the symbols and the substance to ensure that the chance of a police force acceptable across the community is not lost. I briefed him on the recent meetings the Taoiseach and the Minister had with the British.

Dáithí O'Ceallaigh

1 August, 2000

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Police Authority
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

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24 July 2000

The Most Rev Dr Sean Brady
Archbishop of Armagh
Ara Coeli
Cathedral Road
ARMAGH

Dear Fr Brady,

Following passage of the Police (NI) Bill through the House of Commons, and prior to its debate at second reading in the House of Lords, I felt it would be important to update you regarding the Police Authority's outstanding concerns about this draft legislation.

You may already be aware through previous correspondence of the three key areas of concern which the Authority has in relation to the Police Bill and although the Bill saw some minor changes at report stage in the House of Commons, these in large part remain.

Firstly, the Authority is worried by the Government's position on police planning. There are two key issues in this area. Firstly, Government has refused to include the Policing Board's power to set performance targets for the police on the face of the Bill. These targets are a vital tool in holding the police to account for their performance and were included in the Police (NI) Act 1998. Government has stated these will be covered in regulations governing the contents of the plan which it will produce, something which we also feel is unnecessary. The policing plan is based on consultation with the people of Northern Ireland and belongs to them. It is unnecessary and unhelpful to the credibility of that process (and indeed the new Policing Board) to constrain it in this way.

Secondly, the Authority has outstanding concerns about the issue of financial accountability. The Bill in its current form will mean the effective transfer of this responsibility from the Police Authority to the Chief Constable and will thereby reduce the new Board's oversight of police expenditure. It will also, in making the Chief Constable as opposed to the Policing Board responsible for securing best value in the police service, even further reduce the Board's power in this area. Both these measures run contrary to best practice in England and Wales.

Finally, there is the issue of the Board's power to call for reports and initiate inquiries in relation to police activities. This is an important power but one which the Authority agrees should be used only in extreme circumstances. This should not however mean that such restrictions are placed on it resulting in a power which can never be used. The Authority is therefore disappointed that although Government initially accepted that it may have gone too far with these restrictions it has not in fact reduced their damaging impact through the amendments it put forward in the House of Commons.

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The attached brief-sheet sets out in more detail our views on these and issues and other changes which the Authority feels are necessary to give this legislation the potential to improve police accountability in Northern Ireland. We believe it is vital that there is movement on these issues if the new Policing Board is to be a success. With these changes we hope the Policing Board can from the time it is established operate as a strong, independent and powerful accountability body, something which will benefit everyone in Northern Ireland, and in particular the police themselves.

If you require any further information on any of the issues raised in this letter or attached brief-sheet please do not hesitate to contact me or my officials on 028 9070 0488 or writing to me at the address above.

Yours sincerely

P J ARMSTRONG
Chairman

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