

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAB/1127/RE

① Mr Bell  
② POL  
16/18

Mr Wyatt

OPINION IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

1. As a result of the hunger strike support for "green" politicians - anti-H-Blockers, IIP, People's Democracy etc - has increased among the Catholic community in the North at the expense of both the SDLP and the Catholic working class politicians such as Mr Fitt, Mr Devlin and the WP-RC. The SDLP hope to regain the support they have lost, over time. But it will not be easy. Some believe that a sea-change in minority politics has occurred in West Belfast, and go as far as to say that Catholics there will never again come to accept the union. This is probably an extreme view. But sensible observers speak of a radicalisation of politics in the urban minority. There is a sense of drift and indecision following the end of the hunger strike. The young in particular are disillusioned with traditional politics and tend to regard conventional politicians as offering wrong answers to irrelevant questions. They are turning to extreme nationalist politics - "Brits out" - as somehow dealing with the "real" issues. As a West Belfast politician put it privately last week, Carron and his friends are becoming the Tony Benns of Northern Ireland Catholics.

2. It is too soon to tell whether this mood will last. Much will depend on the future of the prison protest and the sympathy which the Provos manage to extract over it. But much will also depend on whether the Government, and minority politicians such as Hume, Fitt and the WP-RC, can prove to urban Catholics that conventional politics can resolve every-day problems. These politicians are very much aware of their difficulty and need our help. We can assist by:

*Mr Blatherwick (i) phoned late on Friday. A recent meeting with DOB officials led him to feel that they were becoming rather complacent about their efforts in W. Belfast and needed to be dealt in.*

(i) getting government services to operate in areas such as West Belfast, where they have not been fully operative for some months. The DOE is pursuing the question of cleaning up West Belfast, which is probably the worst affected area. Much has already been done. If the conditions of life there could be improved, it would have a major effect.

(ii) encouraging the RUC in their programme of extending normal policing into areas where they have been forced to take a low profile because of the hunger-strike rioting.

*Perhaps next 4 pm meeting on Monday will throw more light on this and provide an opportunity to stress the importance of clean-up and tidying-up work.*

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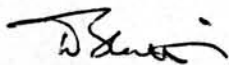
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- (iii) showing that conventional minority politicians have influence, by listening to them and taking their advice;
- (iv) pursuing the Anglo-Irish talks hard in order to finesse the Provisionals' appeal to Irish nationalism;
- (v) cultivating the Catholic hierarchy.

3. In particular it might help if the S of S were to invite an SDLP delegation to Stormont soon, as foreshadowed in his meeting with Mr Hume. I know that some leading members of the party are anxious for such a meeting.



D E S BLATHERWICK  
Political Affairs Division

16 October 1981

cc: PS/S of S (I&B)  
PS/Lord Gowrie (I&B)  
PS/PUS (I&B)  
Mr Bell ✓  
Mr Marshall  
Mr Blelloch  
Mr Chesterton  
Mr Davenport  
Mr Harrington  
Miss MacGlashan  
Mr Simpson, DOE (NI)

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