

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Jackson
2 JUN 1981 *Mr MacLay*
SLJ
3.6.81
Mr P. Duffell
MT 5/6

PAB/1043/RE

DOB 3076
- JUN 1981
N.I.O. BELFAST

cc: PS/PUS (I&B)
Mr Blelloch
Mr Chesterton
Mr Gilliland
Miss MacGlashan

Mr Wyatt

WHERE NEXT?

1. The Prime Minister's speech on 28 May has gone down in the Catholic community like a lead balloon. Anyone I have told - Catholic or Protestant - that the chief purpose of the Prime Minister's visit was to reassure Catholic opinion, has been incredulous. All they have seen or heard is the Prime Minister repeating a policy of no surrender to the IRA, and saying again in interviews that a crime is a crime. Some of them, for example Bishop Daly (see my separate minute), have pointed out passages in the speech as finally drafted which offend Nationalist opinion. The hierarchy ostentatiously avoided the Prime Minister, emphasising further their disagreement with Government policy; and our attempts to get them to see her have reawakened the suspicions at least of Bishop Daly that we wanted to use them for our own ends. The result of the Prime Minister's visit has been further to alienate Catholics, and to cause even some moderate Protestants to wonder what we are at.

2. When people of influence read in full what the Prime Minister said (and her speech has been widely circulated) we may be able to claw back some of the ground lost - though the vast majority of Northerners will not read it, and unfavourable initial impressions will stick. We can hope to exploit the "softer" parts of what the Prime Minister said, for example by amplifying them in public statements. A major aim must be to try to get the hierarchy on board again. Bishop Daly seemed on Friday to be in favour of a meeting between the Secretary of State and the Cardinal, which would need some ground-work before it could be set up. A message to the Cardinal, even at this late stage, might offer a way both to set the ball rolling for a meeting and to get the message of reassurance to the Catholic community across in more explicit terms. But if we wanted to publish such a message without offending him further, we should probably have to get his permission first.

3. This is all very well so far as it goes. However, virtually all my contacts agree that though expressions of concern for the Catholic

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community might well slow the process of their gradual alienation from Government in the short term, only the end of the hunger strike will stop it and enable us to begin reversing the trend; and that unless the hunger strike ends soon, probably before the next hunger strikers die and certainly before the beginning of the marching season, the situation will then begin to deteriorate rapidly.

4. The hunger strike and security problems have mesmerised everyone (including, in popular opinion, HMG). Many people would like to see the Government start some political process in order to give the community something positive to think about in the future and to show that politics, not violence, offers a way forward. Few would advocate launching an initiative now, but it is perhaps not too soon to start talking about the need for political movement in the wake of the local elections.



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Political Affairs Division

1 June 1981