

20 AUG 1979

~~Mr. McFlaster~~ ~~Mr. Carlson~~ ? file
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E. R.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Mr. 20/8

- c.c. PS/PUS (I&B)
- Mr. Stowe (L)
- Mr. Hannigan
- Mr. Lane
- Mr. Burns
- Mr. Marshall (L)
- Mr. Clift
- Mr. Wilson (L)
- Mr. Gilliland
- Mr. Davenport

Mr. Cigney

IMB : 1561
 - 9 AUG 1979
 N.I.O. BELFAST

Good to see we
able to get good advice
like this.

In order to learn more of Catholic attitudes in W.Belfast and to determine whether there had been a recent increase in minority support for the Provisional IRA, Mr. Gee, Mr. Clift and myself had lunch with Ch. Supt. Seymour Dobson, responsible for RUC CR work throughout the Province and Supt. Bill Wilson, who is in charge of the RUC's CR work in Belfast.

2. On the whole, their view was not unoptimistic and they discounted any particular fears that had been expressed to us of a significant increase in PIRA support. They pointed to several factors which were encouraging or at least not discouraging:

(a) the relatively low turnout for PSF/RAC marches which could normally muster only 40-50 participants. This weekend's marches they thought would be exceptional because of their commemorative nature and because of the particular efforts being made by PIRA to whip up support; the turnout for them should not therefore be taken as indicative of the real level of PIRA's support.

(b) the influence of the Church, which they saw as a major bulwark against PIRA. There had been a time when W.Belfast's young curates had all been heavily influenced by PIRA's ideals; this was no longer so. The calibre of people appointed recently to be parish priests had improved significantly, too, although this did not mean that they would actively come out in support of the security forces in their sermons.

(c) the overall passivity/apathy of the population. People had become deadened by 10 years of violence and filtered out terrorist incidents. The absence of any expression of public indignation at the murder of policemen or the burning of the Belgravia did not imply support for the crimes.

(d) stone-throwing incidents, in their view, one of the better indicators of support, had declined particularly in W.Belfast and Londonderry.

(e) the fact that the Fianna now had actively to recruit members might indicate a lessening of the pool of voluntary support. There was little direct recruitment in schools where headmasters/mistresses still exercise a great deal of positive influence. Relationships between the RUC 'CR' and headteachers was good but there was as yet very little direct contact between pupils and the Police in school-time. The police education and career classes that operated successfully in GB and elsewhere in NI had yet to be introduced to schools in hard Catholic areas.

(f) they did not consider the level of subscription to be a helpful indicator of support. A high level of income from

/...subscriptions

surely if the PIRA can draw up a high level of support on special occasions this is a fairly accurate representation of what support for their aims.

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subscriptions would probably lead to a decrease in support because of the need for extortion.

(g) the propaganda effect of An Phoblacht and the Andersonstown News was not particularly significant, except in so far as they operated as organs for disseminating the party line.

3. On the other hand, whilst they could point to no obvious sign of an increase in support, they did not by any means paint a rosy picture:

(a) PIRA exercised a considerable degree of influence either by direct intimidation or by the perceived threat of intimidation. A punishment shooting or a murder every 3 months (like the assassination of Mr. O'Hanlon, a prominent businessman who had reported a hijacking to the Police) was sufficient to keep people in line.

(b) a generation of teenagers had been brought up in an atmosphere of violence and were imbued with it and once past the 10 year mark a new generation would be similarly indoctrinated.

(c) PIRA had significantly improved its effectiveness and its security by its structural reorganisation. It would remain an immediate and a long-term threat. More worrying was the growth of left-wing terrorism in the form of INLA and it was significant that certain elements of PIRA were considering whether or not to link up with INLA. Fortunately left-wing radicalism did not go down well in W.Belfast.

(d) unemployment remained the key factor to the reduction in community support for the methods of terrorist. The problem had found no solution and all the indicators were that public expenditure cutbacks would make the unemployment situation worse.

4. Overall, whilst they thought that the RUC were making advances in W.Belfast, and becoming more acceptable - they pointed to the fact that their CR people could go anywhere in NI - the key to acceptability in their opinion lay in SDLP and Church backing, and there was little prospect of that.

5. Other issues raised were:

(a) Community associations: Like the clerics, they believed that the balance had tilted too far towards community organisations which were easily infiltrated by paramilitary organisations and away from the traditional structures of a democratic society, like local councils, schools, and the Churches. They accepted that BAN and its emphasis on reactivating community activity had probably been right in its time but they wanted to see local councillors and the Church give more prominence. Citing Springhill as a prime example, they argued that community centres and other public facilities should come under council supervision and control rather than somewhat dubious community associations.

(b) Whiterock Industrial Estate: Supt. Wilson was concerned

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about the proposal that the Army should take over the Department of Commerce's industrial estate in Whiterock. He accepted that it might have security advantages in its oversight of the Turf Lodge (although he wondered about the site's vulnerability to mortar attack) but thought that an Army takeover would provide PIRA with good recruiting propaganda in the area. He accepted the need for a package but suggested that the quid pro quo of new housing at Fort Monagh would not be sufficient to compensate for the loss of a GTC, an IWFU and 2 factories. Unemployment was the main problem and if civil government was to have any credibility in the area, at a time when PES cuts were beginning to bite and factories were closing down, then it should show its absolute commitment to the training and employment needs of W.Belfast. He doubted whether the relocation of the GTC facilities to Boucher Road would be as effective as the Department of Manpower Services claimed. Certainly, those who wanted to be trained would attend, but the waverers, who might have been attracted by a GTC near to them, would not go across the motorway to the main Boucher Road complex.

(c) De Lorean: There was growing concern that De Lorean would not be the panacea originally thought. There were rumours that the supervising and skilled jobs were all going to Protestants and there was a risk that if this perception grew, PIRA would take action against the site.

(d) Pope's visit: They would have welcomed a Papal visit if only because it would have allowed them to give a further demonstration of RUC impartiality.

(e) NUPRG and Independence: They felt it important to have official contact with the NUPRG and other such groups, if only to give encouragement to the idea that political debate was better than paramilitary action.

6. Neither had any complaints. RUC 'CR' had sufficient finance and manpower for their purposes and they were confident of the full backing of the Chief Constable. It surprised me, however, that there were only 100 or so CR^{men} on the ground throughout Northern Ireland and only 9 CR men in W.Belfast (6 CR and 3 youth liaison officers), but they considered that to be sufficient.

A.E. Huckle

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Division 3(B)
9 August 1979
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