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BS 21116

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PAB/1898/BN

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - M
PS/Mr Scott (L&B) - M
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - M
PS/PUS (L&B) - M
PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Stephens
Mr Brennan - M
Mr Chesterton - M
Mr Innes
Mr Elliott
Mr Spence
Mr Gilliland
Mr Bell - M
Mr G Hewitt
Miss Elliott - M
Mr Blackwell
Mr S Hewitt
Mr Mackay - M

VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SITUATION

Over the course of the last two or three days, I have had discussions with a number of contacts who wished to talk about the present state of affairs in Northern Ireland.

2. As reported in earlier minutes, most are very concerned and rather pessimistic about the prospects for the immediate future in particular the July parades in Portadown which led to fairly widespread disturbances last year. The most prevalent view is that not only did they expect to see street disturbances and attacks on the RUC, but also widespread sectarian attacks in areas where Catholics are in a small minority.

3. Most of the people I spoke to expressed the view that HMG, through the Secretary of State, should exercise firm authority and not allow the baser elements in the protestant community to manipulate the situation any further. As one of the people said to stop the 'tail wagging the dog'.

4. It is worth noting that most of these contacts are from the protestant community and in fact one of them summed up the reaction in that community to the Anglo Irish Agreement as

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'protestants hate the prospect of a united Ireland more than they love the union'.

5. I received a more worrying report that a branch of the Ulster Club had met at the leisure centre in Seymour Hill Dunmurry recently and, after starting their meeting with prayers, they moved on to discuss such edifying topics as 'burning out fenians' and 'doing something about people who are part of a mixed marriage'. Apparently whenever the topic of mixed marriages was discussed several people got up and left the meeting presumably because of connections or involvement with mixed marriages.

There was also talk of 'preparations' along the same lines as was discussed before the day of action in March of this year and from other local knowledge similar rumours are circulating in the Lisburn area.

6. During a discussion with three Catholic contacts, two of them were seriously concerned that the Anglo Irish Agreement would deliver all right not only in positive measures, but also attacks against Catholic property and individuals.

Comment

7. The main points to be drawn from these contacts seems to be a desire on all sides for firm and decisive action by the Secretary of State particularly in relation to the sort of anarchy being preached by the DUP at this time. There does not seem to be any real fear of a 'civil war' but there is considerable concern that the fabric of society will be further damaged if there is seen to be any sort of a breakdown in law and order.


J E McCONNELL

Political Affairs Division

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