

MR Spence

Thanks

MA 25/3

UNDER/ SEC
23 MAR 1988
CENT SEC

PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - B

- cc PS/SofS (L&B) B
- PS/Mr Stanley (L&B) B
- PS/PUS (L&B) B
- PS/Sir K Bloomfield B
- Mr A W Stephens B
- Mr Burns B
- Mr Chesterton B
- Mr Spence B
- Mr Innes B
- Mr Miles B
- Mr Kirk B
- Mr Bell B
- Mr McConnell, PAB B
- Mr Wood (L&B) B

Mr Hamilton 25/3
to see a return

M 24/3

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH CHURCH LEADERS ON 21 MARCH

Dr Mawhinney joined the Secretary of State in meeting Cardinal O Fiaich, Archbishop Eames, Moderator Fleming, Dr Simpson and Mr Hamilton for a discussion on 21 March. Mr McConnell was also present. The context of the discussion was of course last Saturday's outrage when two soldiers were murdered in Andersonstown.

2. The Secretary of State reflected the widespread revulsion felt at these murders and at the other murders over the previous week. The way in which the RUC had approached recent paramilitary funerals had been a genuine attempt to avoid confrontation at a time of strong emotions and in a highly-charged atmosphere, and in this the Chief Constable had his full support. Some of the funerals in the past week had passed off quietly and indeed both which ended in tragedy had started peacefully. But subsequent events had underlined the critical importance of all people, and in particular all leaders in the community, demonstrating their full public support for the RUC and security forces. Unless violence was eradicated, then prospects for civilised life were indeed gloomy.

3. The Archbishop endorsed this view but, on behalf of the community voiced the question as to where we were now headed. He drew attention to his anxieties about the effect on GB opinion, and not least on GB industrialists, of last Saturday's murders. Dr Fleming similarly assured the Secretary of State of his support and drew attention to what he perceived as a growing sense of frustration in the community. This could be arrested only by some sort of gesture to restore equilibrium and confidence in a return to normality, although he had no suggestion as to what that gesture might be. In response the Secretary of State said that he understood why, following a wave of random events from the killing at Aughnacloy to the murder of the two soldiers, people should be bewildered, and this added force to the need for stability, constancy and purpose. These were objectives which he had in mind in the current round of talks on political developments (and the Secretary of State emphasised that he wished to reconvene the meeting with the SDLP which had had to be postponed from that day).

4. Mr Hamilton and the Cardinal followed by endorsing all that their colleagues had said. The Cardinal underlined the feelings of frustration and fear but pointed out that both communities did not see the development of the current situation in the same terms.

5. Dr Eames then asked if there was anything further the group of Churchmen could do. The Secretary of State immediately referred to Mr Molyneaux's claim that the RUC had been inhibited from responding quickly on the previous Saturday by political direction, whereas in fact the decision on the manner of policing funerals was entirely at the discretion of the Chief Constable. Mr Fleming commented that there was a widespread feeling that the current policy on paramilitary funerals needed to be reviewed and that there was an anxiety at the growth of no-go areas.

6. Lastly the Secretary of State asked if the Church leaders' group intended to take any joint action. The group undertook to consider this (and colleagues will have seen the joint statement which they subsequently put out - couched in rather weak terms).

(pp M E Donnelly)

D J WATKINS
Private Secretary

22 March 1988

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