

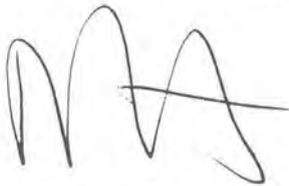
C O N F I D E N T I A L

FROM: N HAMILTON
Central Secretariat
23 August 1990

Mr Alston

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

1. At yesterday's meeting of ISG, reference was made to some earlier work about community perceptions of Government.
2. In that context, I thought you might be interested in having sight of the paper to which I referred. I prepared this earlier this year as a contribution to consideration of confidence issues etc but it ended up as the subject of discussions involving the Secretary of State. I understand it was also copied widely throughout HQNI and elsewhere!
3. I would be happy to discuss these issues with you on your return from leave.



NIGEL HAMILTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L

GR.2898/NH

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NORTH AND WEST BELFAST

1. Any consideration of confidence in and respect for the security forces in these areas in 1990 must be set in context. From the contacts within Central Secretariat and other arms of day to day administration, the following points are worth noting:-
 - a. Circumstances and perceptions in 1990 have improved considerably since the 1970s in terms of reduction in attacks on security force personnel on the ground, in the incidence of street rioting, in the stoning of individuals and vehicles, and in general abuse given to personnel.
 - b. Relationships with Army Units varies from regiment to regiment, depending on a mixture of previous experience, image of that regiment, and rumour/exaggeration of rumour on a day to day basis.
 - c. It must also be recognised that within West and North Belfast there are many differing interest groups, political views, people with ulterior motives, and so any view about the security forces must necessarily be of a general nature.
2. Despite the obvious improvement in relationships between the security forces and the people in these areas over the years, this should not be interpreted as evidence of any significant improvement in confidence. The Army is still deeply mistrusted, seen by many as an imposition by the British Government rather than as a protector of the areas, and is still viewed with very deep suspicion by a large percentage of the population. In this context, the facts and comments made by local leaders in the community, including Sinn Fein on security incidents such as the recent shooting on the Falls Road will almost always be believed rather than the British Government version of such events. The suspicions which emerge from incidents such as the shootings, the Stalker affair, the current Wallace allegations only serve to fuel this lack of confidence.

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3. The RUC are viewed as marginally better than the Army and it is interesting to note, from comments received, that local contacts consider this to be of potentially greater long-term benefit, considering the image which the Police Force had in the 1960s and in the 1970s. Again however such perceptions need to be handled carefully since the Police Force is still widely seen as Protestant, with sympathies for the Protestant community, as a further arm of unwelcome British Government intervention in the area, and as an external force which is not particularly highly respected in the area. There is some anecdotal evidence that some mothers, in particular privately welcome the presence of Policemen since they see this as some deterrent to petty crime, drug abuse and street problems. As in other areas, there is very great reluctance to complain about wife bashing, abuse of children, racketeering, and intimidation.

4. A major feature of the activities of both Police and Army is their apparently blunt and non-selective approach to the people in this area, seemingly reflecting a lack of understanding of the nature of the areas. Although things are changing, it is still an area where the local Priest, schoolteachers, doctors and social workers are respected and the sanctity of the Church considered to be important. Specific incidents therefore cause much resentment among the general population and examples quoted within recent months include:-
 - a. Army foot patrols walking across the front of local churches before and after Mass;

 - b. local Priests being refused entry to Police Stations and being forced to remain outside to declare what their business is before being allowed in;

 - c. Priests and other key opinion formers being stopped, and having cars and their bodies searched in full view of local people, including children; and

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- d. representatives of the security forces not returning telephone calls from these key opinion formers.

These are illustrative of the points being made above. It would appear that, whatever the intention of senior commanders, it is the action of personnel on the streets which continues to undermine confidence in the security forces.

5. It is readily accepted, including many individuals in the areas, that the defeat of terrorism is important. It is equally important, however, to ensure that activities on the ground recognise, complement and do not undermine the social and economic initiatives which are also essential to improve the longer-term prospects of stability and normality in these areas. In that context, it is suggested that there is a need for:-

- a. greater awareness at all levels in the security forces of the totality of Government approach;
- b. for those on the ground to identify key opinion formers who, in various ways could be of help to the security forces, if handled sensitively;
- c. for all at the centre of Government to take every opportunity to meet with people from these areas directly, to understand the mind set, to appreciate local viewpoints, and to develop structures through which all these issues can be considered in context.

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APPENDIX 1

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF WEST BELFAST

1. Although West Belfast displays a range of social and economic characteristics, most of the estates would show most of the symptoms outlined below:-
 - High levels of unemployment (up to 80%) with unemployed men not very supportive at home and wives left to organise domestic affairs.
 - A low level of skills and motivation towards employment.
 - Growing levels of alcohol addiction and glue sniffing.
 - A growing incidence of single parent families (in some areas up to 25%).
 - A high dependency on State benefits and other charities such as St Vincent de Paul.
 - Inadequacies in managing domestic budgets with excessive debts and growing dependence on loan sharks.
 - Good housing conditions, but not always suitable in terms of heating standards and costs.
 - Continued adherence to certain traditions of the Church such as confirmation, first communion and certain moral teachings, but a big falling-off in church attendance.
 - Widespread drinking and gambling.
 - Less movement in and out of estates than in the 1970s.
 - A hardcore of Sinn Fein activists, but little sign locally of the activities of other main political parties.

APPENDIX 2

AN ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL AREAS IN WEST BELFAST

1. Any consideration of social, economic, political and security issues in West Belfast must recognise that it is not a homogeneous area, but is rather a collection of urban villages, each with its own local identity and with different characteristics. From the work of a number of agencies in the social and economic fields, an overall impression of each of these areas might be as follows:-

- a. Lower/Middle Falls

An area beginning to show the results of substantial housing and infrastructure investment, benefiting from close proximity to the City Centre and from the activities of statutory and voluntary agencies. Completion of the Divis redevelopment within the next 3-4 years together with the building of Enterprise Centres, the North Howard Complex, the possible development of a Mackies site will all improve local conditions substantially. There is already evidence that a range of social and economic policies is having some positive influence in the area. There is also growing contact with bodies on the Shankill.

- b. Upper Falls/Whiterock/Ballymurphy/Turf Lodge

One of the hardest and most difficult areas in West Belfast. Still very insular with few economic opportunities, problems of motivation, bad schools, and a lack of self-esteem. Needs to have much greater understanding of its needs, its aspirations and its community. Little real evidence yet of the emergence of good community based organisations so that much is still left to the Church.

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c. Andersonstown

The most affluent of all areas in West Belfast, shown by the considerable retail development on the Andersonstown Road. Some encouraging evidence that the more mobile families are staying in the area. Hopeful signs of some job creation activities. The area where SDLP is at its most active.

d. Twinbrook/Poleglass

Despite the excellent housing conditions, this is the area which perhaps shows the most acute social and economic deprivation. There is evidence of poor educational achievement, high incidence of social problems, few employment opportunities, lack of community facilities, and physical isolation.

e. The Shankill

While the Shankill has a major population problem, with a higher than average percentage of elderly, there are signs of some economic rejuvenation along the frontage and through the work of local communities. There is no evidence of any demand to return to live in the area, and there are continuing major problems with education, poor physical environment and too much reliance on traditional industry. There are local groups emerging who are keen to see developments but the area still has a number of competing factional interests.

f. Highfield/Springmartin/Glencairn

This area also displays many of the symptoms of the Shankill itself with underpopulation, over-provision of housing, lack of demand, poor educational achievement, and

lack of local facilities. There is some evidence of some local interests beginning to stir but again many of the problems are long-term and structural in nature and will take time to resolve.

g. Ballysillan/Alliance/Glenbryn

This is one of the hardest of the Protestant areas in North and West Belfast. Many of the activities are dominated by the local paramilitaries, especially in Ballysillan/Tynedale. The Alliance/Glenbryn area shows some signs of stabilising with a strong local community group, as well as a competing paramilitary group. As in many other Protestant areas, there is no emergence of strong, non-political and non-paramilitary local leaders and so much work still needs to be done to encourage the development of such leadership and of bona fide community organisations.

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