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STORMONT CASTLE,  
BELFAST, 4.

BT4 3ST

18th October, 1967.



*Dear Robin.*

In view of the Northern Ireland debate next week it may be of interest to you to see the attached up-to-date summary - prepared last month - by the R.U.C. on the situation in relation to Republican Clubs following the ban which was imposed last Spring.

The police Security Intelligence Review, the last issue of which was sent to you in July, has now been discontinued in view of the more peaceful conditions which now prevail.

Our Ministry of Education are publishing tomorrow a White Paper on educational policy as it affects grants to Voluntary Schools. This will be an important document and as there may be some "adverse" reference to its proposals at Westminster next week it will be as well that you should have a copy with relevant local press comment. We will send you a copy of the Paper tomorrow and will follow this up with press comment later; on the whole we would expect the reaction to be favourable, though I am bound also to say that the Roman Catholic hierarchy may well react adversely and their attitude will certainly be reflected by Nationalist parliamentary spokesmen. It is our expectation that Roman Catholic teachers and laity may well welcome the proposals but of course are unlikely to be in a position to say so publicly.

*Your sincerely  
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REPUBLICAN CLUBS

Prior to the ban on Republican Clubs in Northern Ireland by the Minister of Home Affairs on 7th March, 1967, about 40 such Clubs existed in Northern Ireland and others were in the course of formation. It was the intention of the I.R.A. to use these Clubs as a front organisation in the same way as they used Sinn Fein Cumanns (Clubs) for their militant build-up prior to the opening of the campaign of violence in 1956. By directing its members to join Republican Clubs the I.R.A. had hoped to provide a solid political wing in Northern Ireland without which, they believe, militant action will not succeed. The banning of the Clubs came as a severe blow to the I.R.A. and has undoubtedly created problems for them.

Following the imposition of the ban the leaders of the Republican Movement and members of the Directorate of Republican Clubs made strong efforts through the medium of the Press and television to solicit support for the Clubs and condemnation of the Minister's action in banning them, claiming that the Clubs were mainly interested in cultural, trade union and co-operative projects and the day-to-day problems of the community. On Sunday, 19th March, 1967, a meeting to protest against the ban was held in a cafe in Chapel Lane, Belfast. About 80 persons attended including Mr. Harry DIAMOND, M.P.; Mr. Gerry FITZ, M.P.; Betty SINCLAIR (Communist); Derek PATLICK (Communist); Thomas MITCHELL, ex-Omagh Raid prisoner and active member of I.R.A./Sinn Fein; and Frank McGLADE, Belfast, an ardent leader of the Republican Movement and member of the Ulster Directorate of Republican Clubs. Country members of the Directorate were also present. The following resolutions were read and passed at the meeting:-

- (1) The withdrawal of the ban on Republican Clubs;
- (2) The lifting of the ban on Republican publications;
- (3) The removal of the oath as a requirement for the holding of public office; and
- (4) Electoral reform to gerrymandering.

After the meeting the police detained members of the Directorate for questioning and interviewed other members at their home or on their way to it. The facts of the meeting were obtained and reported to the Attorney General who agreed there was no evidence that it had been organised in breach of the Minister's Order. He directed, however, that several of those who attended should be warned that continued membership of a proscribed organisation would lead to a prosecution.

About the beginning of April, 1967, the Southern Republican leaders formed an eight-man Action Committee within the Clubs with the object of keeping them active and forcing the Directorate into taking positive action to defeat the ban imposed in Northern Ireland. A copy of a leaflet issued by the Action Committee is attached. This met with little or no reaction from the general public. Two outdoor public protest meetings have been held, one in Margaret Square, Newry, on 15th April, 1967, attended by about 30 people, and one in Rossville Street, Londonderry, on 6th May, 1967, when about 100 persons were present. No great interest was shown in the speakers who appealed for support against the ban and at the same time were careful in their choice of words not to commit themselves by admitting membership of the proscribed Clubs.

During the past few months the Ulster Directorate of Republican Clubs has had several discussions in Northern Ireland and here to find the best method of fighting the ban on Republican Clubs but have been unable to agree on policy. The younger element of the Republican Movement favour taking seats in Parliament but the older members refuse to consider any change in the existing policy. The Directorate has been severely

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criticised by members for recommending that a petition of 50,000 signatures against the ban should be collected openly.

It is evident that the ban has been effective in that it has curbed the spread of Irish Republicanism apart from a small die-hard element which exists in such places as Belfast, Londonderry City, South Derry, Newry, Co. Down and Coalisland, Co. Tyrone. There is every indication that the Clubs in these areas will gradually cease to exist in their present form. The I.R.A. had hoped that they would provide a solid political wing in Northern Ireland but they now consider this will not materialise and that the present set-up of the Clubs should be disbanded. They believe that militant action will not succeed without a sound political wing but this cannot be achieved at present as the I.R.A. and Sinn Fein are not pulling together over the question of taking seats in Parliament. There is a growing atmosphere of change within the ranks of the Republican Movement and the leadership feel they must be ready for changes to keep with the modern trend in politics. The leaders of the I.R.A. have lost confidence in the Executive of the Republican Clubs in Northern Ireland and feel that the Clubs will not function satisfactorily under Sinn Fein. There is a suggestion that the I.R.A. may try to form a new political party in Northern Ireland which will embrace all shades of Republican opinion whereby progressive and modern policies can be followed, including the taking of seats in Parliament as well as providing support for militant action. This organisation will be separate from Sinn Fein and under the control of the I.R.A. An effort is being made to sound Republican opinion about this and at the next Sinn Fein Ard Fheis some delegates may propose a resolution supporting the new party, its aims and objectives. Should this be defeated, the I.R.A. may threaten to break from Sinn Fein and support the new party as their political wing.

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MEMORANDUMRepublican Clubs

1. Sinn Fein is the political wing of the militant Irish Republican Movement of which the Irish Republican Army is the military wing. The I.R.A. has been proscribed under the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Acts (Northern Ireland), 1922-1943, since 1922 and when the I.R.A. campaign of violence was renewed in 1956 Sinn Fein was similarly declared to be a proscribed organisation. In 1964 Sinn Fein, recognising the futility of gaining support in Northern Ireland for a proscribed organisation, decided to proceed with the formation of Republican Clubs as "the Civil Wing in the north under the control of Sinn Fein".
2. The Republican Clubs function in exactly the same way as Sinn Fein Clubs and delegates attend the annual general meeting of Sinn Fein. Their objects, as declared in their constitution, include the overthrow of English rule in Ireland and the bringing into effective operation through<sup>out</sup> Ireland of the Proclamation of the Republic, Easter, 1916. (The constitution of the Republic of Ireland maintains the fiction that it extends over the whole of Ireland.) 39 Clubs have been established in Northern Ireland and at the end of 1966 a directorate was formed covering the nine counties of Ulster\*. The directorate, which is subject to the rules of the Governing Body of Sinn Fein, consists of eight men all of whom are leading members of the Irish Republican Movement; five are members of the I.R.A. At the time of the formation<sup>of</sup> the directorate a move was made to revert to the title of "Sinn Fein" but this was defeated because of the proscription of the organisation. The total membership of the Republican Clubs in Northern Ireland is 427, 116 of whom are known to be members of the I.R.A.
3. The I.R.A. look on the Republican Clubs as fruitful sources of recruits and in future nearly all I.R.A. members in Northern Ireland will have to be members of the Clubs. The I.R.A. intend to encourage young men to join with the eventual object of recruitment to the I.R.A.; the Clubs will provide cover under

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\* i.e. the six counties of N. Ireland & the three counties in the Republic which together comprise the ancient province of Ulster.

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which I.R.A. meetings and training sessions will take place; and it will become difficult for the police to differentiate between I.R.A. members and the ordinarily politically minded members of Clubs. The I.R.A. hope that the Clubs will become the centre of subversive activities in Northern Ireland. The I.R.A. hope that the Clubs will play a major part in augmenting the work of Economic Resistance Directorates set up in all parts of Ireland by their education department.

4. A meeting to protest at the Northern Ireland Government's decision to proscribe Republican Clubs was organised in Belfast on 19th March, 1967. This was the meeting attended by Mr. Fitt and Mr. Diamond (a member of the Northern Ireland House of Commons). After the meeting considerable press coverage was given to the detention of four of those present for questioning. All were members of the Ulster directorate; the remaining members were questioned at other times.

5. The imposition of this ban has provoked controversy both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain. Protests are made on the grounds that the ban gravely affects the constitutional rights of members of Republican Clubs to voice opinions contrary to those held by the Government and the fundamental right of free election to Parliament. Against this is the view taken by the Northern Ireland Government that the Republican Clubs are a front organisation for the I.R.A. and are under the control of Sinn Fein and that the aim of both these proscribed organisations is the overthrow of the Northern Ireland Constitution by force of arms. Accordingly public safety and the need to maintain law and order require the maintenance in their full vigour of the Emergency Regulations now in force in Northern Ireland. It is noteworthy that in 1959 the then Attorney General, anent the proscription of Sinn Fein, expressed the view that the regulation neither affected nor purported to affect the election laws of the United Kingdom. He went on to say that the regulation would render liable to prosecution any candidate who, for instance, issued an election address to promote the objects of Sinn Fein.

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