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Meeting with Sinn Féin representative, 27 April 1995

1. I met Francie Molloy of Sinn Féin's National Executive on Thursday 27 April. Fr. Alex Reid was also present.

Mr 2/5

Monitoring the ceasefire

2. In an area by area discussion, the following points arose. In East Tyrone there has been a noticeable increase in the last few days of RUC and British Army checkpoint and search activity. This seems to be related in part to efforts by the security forces to prevent the painting of anti-RUC slogans. Several individuals have been arrested. In the Cappagh and Galbally areas, and in South Co. Derry a significant amount of helicopter activity has been noted. Molloy mentioned some heavyhandedness by the security forces in Dungannon in recent days on which he has supplied details. He has received a number of reports which suggest that British Army patrols have taken to travelling in unmarked vans and minibuses in rural East Tyrone. From Fermanagh, he has received reports of an increase in joint RUC/RIR patrols in the Lisnaskea area. He had nothing of note to report from South Armagh or Belfast.

Republican attitudes

3. He expressed apprehension about the expected British approach in the forthcoming talks with Ancram. He had spoken to Martin McGuinness the previous day: McGuinness at that time expected the first meeting with Ancram to take place in the middle of next week. Fr. Reid had spoken briefly by phone to Gerry Adams the previous evening who had said to him that even though the logjam had been broken, the crisis is not over. (Fr. Reid later commented privately to me that McGuinness, who had analysed in detail the British approach at the official level talks, had told Adams that in his view the British

will continue to pursue an essentially negative and minimalist approach to Sinn Féin, making concessions only grudgingly and as late as possible). Molloy was struck by the growing sense of irritation at the British approach on the part of local SDLP representatives in Tyrone, including several who have been particularly hostile to Sinn Féin and to him personally in the past.

4. Molloy said that the fears at various levels in the Republican community, including the grass roots, remain that the British will concoct obstacles at each stage. The suspicion at senior level is that the British objective now is to restrict Sinn Féin to the exploratory dialogue with Ancram for as long as they can i. e. in an intrinsically secondary forum for continuing "decontamination" (a word which still greatly rankles), while preferential treatment is given to the other major parties. As to the substance of the talks with Ancram, they expect that the British will seek to limit this to a rerun of the points already raised by Thomas in the official level contacts. This British two-track strategy is seen as an effort to split the Republican Movement. The British, in his view, have consistently failed however to understand the dynamics within the Republican Movement. Not only (as he has said to me in the past) did they fail to apprehend the reality and scope of the IRA ceasefire when it happened, they failed to understand the process by which the Republican Movement arrived at the ceasefire and Sinn Féin's role in that. If it is the British conception that Adams, McGuinness, and a few others in Sinn Féin smuggled a reluctant or unknowing Republican Movement into the end to violence, then they are seriously and dangerously mistaken. Molloy added that, even if the current strategy fails, Adams and McGuinness would not be removed. If anything, their position would be stronger within the Republican Movement, as the efforts they have made to move matters

forward along the political path would be fully appreciated. If there is any splintering within the Republican community, it would be small scale and at the very edges and would involve mavericks "who were never really in anyway". He remarked that Sinn Féin - led demonstrations and civil disobedience against the British approach will continue. //

5. Sinn Féin's expectations of early progress in the talks with Ancram are pessimistic. Molloy said that ideally Sinn Féin would wish to proceed rapidly past the exploratory phase of the talks with Ancram (no more than two to three weeks). Ideally, they would also wish to see a quick move to some form of all-party talks in the near future (before the Summer) with those parties who would agree to talk to them which, he assumed, would include in the first instance, in addition to Sinn Féin, the SDLP, Alliance and, he felt, probably the Loyalist fringe parties. The mainstream Unionist parties could join when they feel comfortable. Sinn Féin, he said, have no particular preference on the precise modalities and structures of all-party talks; they are aware, for example, of unhappiness with aspects of the structure of the 1992 talks and are have no wish to be prescriptive on the "shape of the table". The key requirement is equality of treatment by the British Government: Sinn Féin's democratic mandate must be respected, they must be an equal participant and they must not be relegated to a second track.

6. Molloy was mindful of the efforts of the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste to move matters forward. As regards the Taoiseach's comments in the Dáil on 25 February, he mentioned the Taoiseach's reference (in a supplementary response) to the distinction between parties who had never been associated with violence and others. While he understood the point that the Taoiseach was making, he

commented that Republicans, and other Nationalists in the North, would find it difficult to place the two main Unionist parties in the first category, since Unionists, overtly or covertly, have always had access to weapons and, as a political tactic, have relied on the threat of violence against Nationalists.

Lower Ormeau

7. We reviewed developments in the light of the RUC's decision not to allow last Sunday's Orange parade down the Lower Ormeau, which was well received locally. Molloy remains aware of the importance and benefits of a continuing dignified and restrained approach by the Lower Ormeau Residents Group.

Prisons

8. We briefly reviewed this issue: i.e. on prisoners in England, developments in relation to the transfer issue including the positive decision on the transfer of Robert Friers; and the Sinn Féin request for a precleared panel of visitors to IRA prisoners in England. On prisoners in Northern Ireland, he had no specific issue to raise in relation to prisoner releases. The current view in Sinn Féin is that the Summer parole issue will be handled better by the NIO than was the case with Christmas parole.
9. Molloy was travelling from our meeting direct to England (to the Newcastle area, for meetings with community groups and local politicians). Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 3 May.

Postscript

10. After our meeting ended, and as he walked me to my car, Fr. Reid privately reflected on Sinn Féin's current difficulties and concerns, and recalled in this context the importance of three elements which were central to

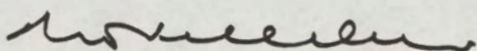
the understanding between the Irish Government and Sinn Féin in the run-up to the ceasefire:

- i) that, in the event of a permanent cessation of violence by the IRA (anything less was unacceptable to the Government), the arms issue would become essentially a secondary question which could be shelved as a "side-issue". The important thing was to keep the arms secure and under the rigid control of the IRA leadership. This has been done. Fr. Reid recalled that some way down the road, in the context of full talks but not before, some stocks could be disposed of/handed up in some way, so as to reassure the Unionists. He referred again to a comment he had made to me last month: that there would not have been a ceasefire if the decommissioning issue had been then what it has become now. The British concentration on the decommissioning issue, he added, is not the way to take the gun out of Irish politics. In any event, the evident reality is that it would be quite easy to obtain commercially the ingredients for a bomb, for example;

- ii) the consensus between the main players on the Nationalist side: the Government, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin are aware of the concerns of the Taoiseach, and were indeed aware of those of the previous Government, about Unionist perceptions of a kind of pan-nationalist juggernaut. The continuation of the consensus, however, is crucial. The essence of the consensus is that it is based on shared democratic principles and it should be understood and presented in that way, rather than as a pan nationalist front. Fr. Reid, for his part, is working to ensure that the Republican leadership clearly understand the Taoiseach's perspectives;

iii) a third factor is that the peace process should show continuing practical results for the grass roots: that there is a productive non-violent alternative.

11. Fr. Reid commented that if the British continue to press Sinn Féin to the brink, then it is possible that some in the Republican Movement will become disenchanted and may wish to take a different approach. What should the leadership do if, say, a third wanted a different approach? One response would be to try and suppress the dissidents, but nobody wants a split and a violent internal conflict. In Fr. Reid's view, the leadership will adjust their political approach in order to ensure continuing cohesion in the Republican Movement. In due course, the leadership will bring their position back to the present tack on the basis of a maintained cohesion but this will be time- and effort-consuming. Fr. Reid indicated that Gerry Adams is conscious of these challenges and dilemmas and mused on parallels with trends and problems in the Israel/Palestine issue.



Declan Kelleher
29 April, 1995