

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

① Mr Bell
② POL
4/6

B2/6

PAB/1147/RE

Mr Wyatt

cc: PS/S of S (I&B)
PS/PUS (I&B)
Mr Blelloch, PS/Mr Bell
Mr Moriarty
Mr Chesterton
Miss MacGlashan

RELATIONS WITH THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY

1. Relations between the Government and the Catholic Hierarchy in Northern Ireland are at present bad. The Cardinal and Bishop Daly, and probably Bishop Philbin too, believe that the Government have ignored their concern and advice over the hunger-strike and unrest in the Catholic community. They consequently hold the Government responsible to some degree for allowing the unrest to develop. As Irish nationalists and sincere churchmen they themselves are pulled in two directions; and their need to maintain moral leadership in their community at a time when, as they see it, the rug is being pulled from under their feet, exacerbates their frustration with Government policies. As if this were not enough, the Cardinal appears to believe (however wrongly) that the Government have inspired the campaign in the British press accusing him and his clergy of being two-faced towards violence; and the campaign itself, although fuelled by English Catholics (Lord Rawlinson and Mrs Shirley Williams), has increased his anti-British and therefore anti-Government feelings. To cap it all, we have managed to give the Cardinal and Bishop Daly grounds for offence over the way they were invited to meet the Prime Minister last week. Bishop Daly at least suspects that we wanted to use him to give credibility in the Catholic community to the tough things the Prime Minister said at lunch about the hunger-strike. Their annoyance, and the fact that we could not get them to meet the Prime Minister, are plastered over the press. It is therefore clear to the public that the hierarchy believe we have ignored and offended them, and that they are maintaining a gap between themselves and Government.

2. This sorry tale is not all our fault. But it is in our interest quickly to restore good relations. We need the hierarchy's continued support in denouncing violence and appealing to the hunger-strikers to give up. The Catholic community take a lead from them, and if they are estranged from the Government, the community will feel estranged too. If we can restore good relations with the hierarchy, Catholic

CONFIDENTIAL

Opinion will follow. Nor should we lose sight of the fact that on many issues other than prisons and riots we shall need the hierarchy's support: the Chilver Report, for example.

3. One or two steps have already been taken to heal the breach. The Prime Minister wrote to the Cardinal on 28 May inviting him to call on her in London. Bishop Daly told me on 29 May that a meeting between the Secretary of State, the Cardinal and himself might be opportune. Mr John Hume is anxious to offer his help. On a rather different level, the Secretary of State has offered to see Cardinal Hume in London.

4. In his present mood, the Cardinal would seem likely to take the opportunity of a meeting only to rehearse his grievances and the Government's failings. Whatever the cathartic advantages, such an interview could make matters worse. It would therefore seem wise to prepare the ground well first without initially involving the Cardinal or Ministers, perhaps through a meeting between officials, Bishop Daly and Mr Hume. At such a meeting officials could say why the Government were disturbed at the present bad relations between them and the hierarchy, offer renewed apologies for any slights over the Prime Minister's visit, and go over the ground on security, politics and the hunger-strike in order to see whether enough common ground could be found to justify a meeting between the Secretary of State and the Cardinal. It would be important to hold off a meeting between the Cardinal and the Prime Minister until after this meeting had taken place.

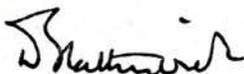
5. We should have to consider publicity for the meetings carefully. One of our major concerns would be to demonstrate publicly that the Government and the hierarchy were back on speaking terms, and perhaps to mark the reconciliation by sending a message of reassurance to the Catholic community. The hierarchy would however be extremely sensitive about publicity, suspecting us of trying to use the various meetings to our advantage. It would be necessary to keep the first meeting (with officials) very private, and to publicise even the fact of further meetings only with the hierarchy's agreement. We might use one meeting (for example, that between the Secretary of State and the Cardinal) to send a message of reassurance to the Catholic community in the form of a message to the Cardinal, which would set a public seal on the process.

6. As to timing, the sooner we can get our relations sorted out the

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

better. When the next hunger-strikers reach a critical phase, the church will again come under increased pressure. And if the Secretary of State is to hold a round of informal talks with the political parties late this month, there would be advantage at least as far as talking to the Nationalist parties is concerned in having made progress towards restoring relations by them. We should therefore perhaps aim to complete the series of meetings by late June. It would be ideal if we could so manage it that the Secretary of State and the Cardinal could meet on say 15 June.



D E S BLATHERWICK
Political Affairs Division

3 June 1981

CONFIDENTIAL