



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2018/28/2807
Creation Dates:	25 March 1988
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

CONFIDENTIAL - BY COURIER SERVICE

25 March 1988

Dear Assistant Secretary

PS Tappin O.C. ✓
 P.C. ✓
 P.S. ✓
 Mr. Nally ✓
 Mr. Deane ✓ / Mr. Ryan ✓
 Campbell A/C ✓
 T.C.

A conversation with Dr. Brian Mawhinney, M.P., PUSS/NIO.

Mawhinney suggested the meeting. He said he would like to say that the situation in West Belfast is very bad. He felt, he said, that he needed to get on-the-ground views and so he invited six parish priests from West Belfast to dinner on Tuesday night, 22 March. He was surprised that they all came, but they did. One was a senior parish priest, one a "middle of the road" priest, and four were "street-smart" but not active Sinn Fein. Out of sensitivity toward them he did not bring them to Stormont but picked a neutral hotel dining room. In the event it seemed they would not have minded being brought to Stormont. Mawhinney said to them he wanted to know what was going on on the ground, if they would tell him, and he would like to have a frank discussion. Their view of the events last Saturday, which Mawhinney said he believed, was that the procession believed it was being attacked; feelings were already very high; the reaction was instinctive; the two soldiers got a hiding, and then the IRA moved in and took control.

The priests said that since Saturday there is an intense self-examination going on in the community: there is guilt, shame, amazement, horror, fear for the future; but that this self-examination is only going on among the over twenty-year-olds. Teenagers, they said, are "lost", they "cannot be reached", they "are out of control altogether", "they would do it again". The priests, said Mawhinney, were at one on this point. They all believe that the Church has no hope of getting through to young people and they said that Mawhinney, no matter how good his intentions, had no hope at all of making an impression on them no matter what approach he tried.

.../

Mawhinney urged the priests, he said, to say what they thought can be done. In the medium to long term, if present feelings could be disipated - which could not happen, they felt - the keys to a radical solution are skilled training, employment and housing. In their mood on Tuesday night, however, they said were not able to look forward in this way. However, when the evening ended, it was they who suggested a further meeting in a couple of months time.

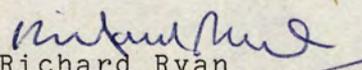
On the question of policing in West Belfast, he wondered what could be done, if anything. One idea that had occurred to him (although, he said, he had no idea what Jack Hermon would think of it) was the possibility of the police trying to patrol West Belfast in the company of church wardens, young priests and other such semi-public people of the community. It would, he added quickly, be a brave thing to ask the wardens, preists and others to do, and it would be dangerous for the police too; he wondered whether the Church would be prepared to look at it or not. He wondered if we would have any views on that idea.

Finally, on the basis that we know each other for quite some time, and because he believes that he is making a little progress talking to ordinary Northern Ireland people, both nationalist and Unionist, he suggested that we could perhaps have an informal meeting about once a fortnight. I said I had no difficulty with that suggestion.

Comment

Mawhinney has grown in his job. His previous narrowness, which led him to obsessive kicking of John Hume and the SDLP, has given way to a much more balanced and relaxed view of the situation and of events. He is, it would seem, making genuine efforts to get out and talk to people. By his own accounts he is having some success. His suggestion to have regular informal exchanges of view would seem to be well-intentioned in the same way.

Yours sincerely


Richard Ryan
Minister-Counsellor