



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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The attached is a report of the current state of play regarding the talks between republican and loyalist paramilitaries initiated by the Maze Chaplains. As can be seen, they are at a very interesting and highly sensitive stage. Fr. Murphy is particularly anxious that knowledge of the current state of play should be kept as restricted as possible. He is particularly concerned that any public hint of their existence could derail the entire initiative and, in that regard, felt that the initiative had three main enemies - the NIO, RUC and DUP each of which he felt would be happy to scuttle the initiative for different reasons.

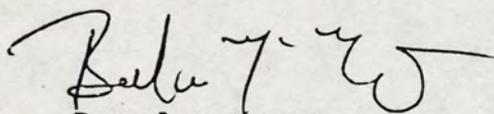
He was anxious that the Taoiseach be kept informed of developments. In that regard he mentioned that when he met with the Taoiseach during the hunger strike, the Taoiseach had offered to maintain direct personal contact with him. He never followed up on this offer owing to the fact that Bishop Philbin came to hear of the matter at the time and vetoed such direct contact. While he is sure that Bishop Daly would not take the same line on this as his predecessor, he is happy to maintain his current links to the Taoiseach through the existing channel. He is most anxious that his information not be used in such a manner as to undermine the current initiative and at the same time would be anxious to have any feedback from the Taoiseach on the initiative.

Incidentally, he mentioned that "he did not expect any trouble from Molyneaux" - I gathered that Eames had probably already received the O.K from him regarding the initiative.

While Fr. Murphy is probably more optimistic than many observers would be regarding the prospects of his initiative, it is nonetheless an extremely interesting development entailing, as it does, the military leadership of the IRA (as distinct from Adams etc) in talks with probably the most hardline loyalist paramilitary organisation. Fr. Murphy feels that the apparent

flexibility being shown by the UVF is indicative of the current general uncertainty among loyalists as regards their future in a changed anglo/irish relationship in the broader context of a Europe of 1992.

Fr. Murphy has been Catholic Chaplain in the Maze for over 10 years and is one of the people in Northern Ireland most familiar with Provo, and indeed Loyalist psychology. He played a pivotal role during the hunger strike and appears to be very highly regarded by the NIO. It is possible that the NIO have wind of the extent to which his initiative has developed. He mentioned to me that Sir John Blelloch has invited him to a private lunch later this week and Murphy expects the occasion to involve a certain amount of probing by Blelloch on that occasion. However, it is his intention to keep the NIO out of the picture, at least at this delicate stage.



Brendan McMahon

Anglo/Irish Division

14/11/88

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I refer to my earlier reports of 21 July and 4 October concerning the talks between the representatives of the Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries in the Maze which were organised by the Catholic and Church of Ireland Chaplains with the full support of Cardinal O' Fiaich, Archbishop Eames, Bishop Cahal Daly and Bishop Poyntz.

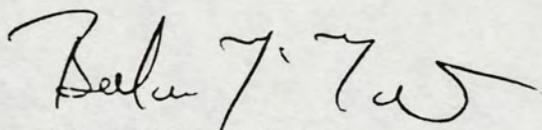
The Catholic Chaplain, Fr. John Murphy, has now informed me on a highly confidential basis that these talks have now moved outside the confines of the prison and that the Army Council of the IRA and the leadership of the UVF have now agreed to separate talks with the Chaplains outside the prison. These talks are likely to begin this week and initially will involve separate talks between the leadership of both organisations with the two Chaplains. These talks are exploratory to see if a basis can be found for face to face talks between the two organisations in the near future.

At present, neither the UDA nor INLA are involved. The UVF have indicated that they prefer to exclude the UDA for the moment owing to the current state of confusion within that organisation and to their fears regarding the level of security force penetration of the UDA. However, should a basis for talks be found, the UVF have indicated that the UDA would then be brought into the picture, without however giving them any impression that they had been excluded from any earlier exercise. For this reason, the current talks are being kept secret. The Provos have given similar indications regarding INLA participation.

Fr. Murphy was frankly surprised at the speed with which events had moved and was particularly surprised at the signs of apparent flexibility being shown by the UVF in this exercise whereby they have indicated a willingness at least to talk about a wide range of possible future arrangements for Ireland, not excluding concepts like a federal Ireland. It is his intention to press ahead with the matter as quickly as possible in order to maintain the current momentum.

The role of the Bishops in this matter remains one of support without however any involvement in the day to day conduct of the talks. Their role will only come into play should the initiative move to a more public arena when their support will be called on to forestall any attempt by other political interests to derail the initiative. (In that regard, he mentioned that none of the Bishops were aware that the talks had moved outside the prison and that knowledge of this was confined to the leadership of the IRA and UVF, the two Chaplains, and now, ourselves.)

From my discussion with Fr. Murphy, I gathered that he would hope to steer the talks in the direction of the concept of a federal Ireland which he sees as offering the best hope for agreement based on the four provinces including a 9 county Ulster with a separate province type arrangement for Dublin similar to the District of Columbia in the U.S. However, all such ideas are necessarily tentative for the moment.



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14/11/88

cc A/Sec Gallagher ✓  
Mr. O' Donovan