



NOTE OF A MEETING WITH ARCHBISHOP O'FLAICH
AT 3.00 PM ON FRIDAY 28 JULY 1978

Those present: Secretary of State Archbishop O'Flaich
Mr James
Mr Pilling

The meeting began and ended with a general discussion about the political, economic and security situation in the province. The Secretary of State said that in his view the SDLP were making a mistake by not engaging in talks on the political and constitutional position. Archbishop O'Flaich said that he had an impression of more relaxation and co-operation between politicians at a local level. He recalled that he had had the new Lord Mayor of Belfast and his wife to a gathering in the Archbishop's residence at Armagh. He said that he was more hopeful of peace and a good measure of positive co-operation than he would have been 6 months before.

Archbishop O'Flaich said that he considered the position in the Maze was still fairly explosive. He was hoping to visit the Maze on Sunday. He had not been there since the 'dirt' strike had started. He understood the difficulty of making any sort of concession but he wondered whether it was possible to make a move by, say, not having the prisoners locked up in their cells for such a time or whether they could be allowed reading material or radios. The Secretary of State said that the prisoners were depriving themselves of these privileges and he recalled that cells had been cleaned out only a few weeks before. He said that so far as he could see no concession was possible on the Government's side.

Archbishop said that it seemed to him that anything that was to affect a man's health over a long period had to be in its own right as a separate question without too much

regard to other issues. The Secretary of State said that so far as he knew there was no sign of a problem over health yet but he would be glad to receive a report from the Archbishop after his visit on Sunday. The Archbishop said that so far as he could see the protest would continue on and on unless the Government could find some form of bait to encourage the prisoners to drop the protest. Mr James said that the issue of political status was clear cut. Any sort of concession would be an encouragement to the protesters to go for more until they had obtained full and unequivocal political status. The Archbishop said that he might be making some public comment after his visit to the Maze according to how he felt when he had seen the current state of the prison. He mentioned that his request to meet Gusty Spence had been turned down. The Secretary of State said that he knew that he had hoped to meet Gusty Spence but that must be a matter for the Governor to decide. He did not know what view the Governor had taken of the request.

The Archbishop said that he had received the draft Order on Homosexual Law Reform. This would probably be discussed by the next meeting of the Northern Bishops and their views would be reported to the Northern Ireland Office.

The Archbishop said that he had seen Monica Craig last week in Armagh. Her condition seemed a little improved - she had been more talkative.

The Secretary of State mentioned 1 PARA and the Archbishop said that that had worked out better than he had expected. According to reports he had received from people in South Armagh 1 PARA had seemed to lean over backwards to establish better relations with the community.

The Archbishop said that he wanted to mention the episode where a person had been carried in a coffin but he did not want to make much of it because he understood that no-one had been injured. The Secretary of State said that he had asked the GOC about the

episode but had not been told what had happened.

The Archbishop raised the question of long remands in custody. He wondered whether anything could be done to shorten the period that people were held on remand. Some people in Armagh and in the Maze had been held for periods of up to 12 months. The Secretary of State said that there was a review of this in hand. He would see if he could gather some information together and send it to the Archbishop.

The Archbishop raised the Amnesty International Report but said that he understood that it was now in effect sub judice because of the Bennett Committee and he did not expect the Secretary of State to say much about it. The Secretary of State explained the background to the Report. The Archbishop commented that whatever sort of Committee was set up there would always be a suspicion about what Amnesty International had alleged particularly when it affected one side of the community.

In conclusion, the Secretary of State outlined all that the Government had done over the last 2 years to help the minority community and emphasised the desirability of members of the minority community joining the security forces and, in particular, the RUC. The Archbishop said that he still saw it as unlikely that the RUC would be accepted in some areas without some form of structural change. He regarded policing as a big and continuing problem. He was glad to see so many of the towns opening up again though this had not happened completely yet in Armagh where he assumed there had not been a big push from the trades people. But in general there was more normality and relaxation, more entertainment, people were more prepared to go out at night and there seemed to him to be more friendliness about the community.



J G PILLING
PS/Secretary of State

31 July 1978