

6 JUL 1979

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Mr Tompkins
 For our file - our
 (shortened version)
 contribution is included.

1. PUS (L & B) - M
2. PS/S of S (L & B)

cc: Mr Hannigan
 Mr Stowe - M
 Mr Marshall - M
 Mr Burns
 Mr Gilliland
 Mr Jackson
 Mr Cromey
 Mr Coulson

SCJ
 6.7.79

CARDINAL TOMAS O FIAICH

1. As requested in Mr Brown's minute of 26 June, I attach a personality note and briefing for the Secretary of State's meeting with Cardinal O Fiaich on 9 July.

2. Separate notes are attached on the Maze protest, the Bennett Report and the security situation, as these are questions which the Cardinal may raise. If the Cardinal does discuss the Bennett Report, the Secretary of State may wish to give him the attached copy of the summary of action to be taken on the recommendations of the Bennett Committee. The Secretary of State has already received from the PUS a note on the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland.

SPEAKING NOTES

3. The Secretary of State may wish to begin by repeating his congratulations to the Cardinal on his elevation. He could ask whether the Pope had anything to say to him about the problems of Ireland.

4. He could go on to ask how the Cardinal saw his role and that of the Church in solving these problems. He knows the Cardinal to be a supporter of the ecumenical movement. Does this offer a way forward?

5. He has read the Cardinal's condemnations of violence. His Archdiocese has suffered more than most. Surely one way of securing more effective protection against the men of

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violence. would be if more Catholics enlisted in the security forces. The RUC was an impartial force. Could the Cardinal not use his influence to persuade more of his flock to join it.

6. The Secretary of State could conclude by saying that he will be happy to see the Cardinal at any time. He hopes that the Cardinal will feel free to get in touch with him, not only when he has specific problems, but also to talk generally about the problems of the province.



T H GEE

Division 3(B)

5 July 1979

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Roman Catholic: Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland

Background:

The Rt Rev Mgr Tomas O Fiaich was born in 1923 near Crossmaglen in the staunchly nationalist area of S. Armagh, where his father was a school teacher. Most of his career has been spent in the academic world, studying at Maynooth, Wexford, Dublin and Louvain and specialising in Irish culture and history and early Irish Christianity. In 1953 he returned to Maynooth as a teacher of history, and was elected President in 1974. His handling of a difficult transitional period in the history of the college, which under his predecessor had become a college of the National University of Dublin, earned him a reputation in some circles as a diplomatist. He was criticised, however, for his conservative line in a controversy over the dismissal of two teachers from the College staff who had decided to renounce the priesthood. Mgr O Fiaich is a keen supporter of Irish culture; he is closely associated with the Irish Language Movement and chaired two bodies set up by the Irish Government to promote its revival. He has written several books, including a biography of St. Oliver Plunkett, a former Archbishop of Armagh. Dr O Fiaich was elevated to the College of Cardinals in June 1979.

Personality and Political Views:

Dr. O Fiaich has a warm and outgoing personality and a direct down-to-earth manner. His pastoral experience is limited: he was the first Primate for over 100 years to have had no episcopal experience and he only served as a curate in Clonfeacle (Tyrone) for a short while after his ordination in 1948. His appointment was, however, popular among the clergy and people of his native Archdiocese of Armagh in which he had displayed a continuing interest. He is a strong supporter of the ecumenical movement. He does not consider himself to be a political priest and is very different from Cardinal Conway who was extremely well informed politically, keeping in contact with most of the leading politicians North and South of the border. Nevertheless whatever he says about being a spiritual and not a political leader, his public comments on NI political issues have gained him notoriety. He has been completely open about his nationalist views, affirming his personal aspirations to eventual Irish unity. He has openly supported the idea of a phased British withdrawal, which he feels has the best chance of producing an acceptable solution in the long term. He has expressed interest in the concepts of independence and federalism as possible interim stages to reunification.

After a pastoral visit to the Maze prison in July 1978 the Cardinal issued a statement which called on the Government to take humanitarian steps to provide for the protesters "basic human needs". This was widely interpreted as supporting the protesters' demand for 'special category' status. In fact the Cardinal's stance is close to that of the SDLP in that he has not supported the call for political status but believes that there are separate humanitarian problems which the Government

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has the power to resolve. Like them he has criticised the Emergency Provisions Act, implying that many prisoners are only in prison because of the existence of this "repressive" legislation. All this has hardly endeared the Cardinal to Unionist politicians who see him as a hardline nationalist. On social questions he has maintained his predecessor's conservative line on such questions as divorce, mixed marriages, integrated education and homosexual law reform. He has in the past issued regular and strongly worded condemnations of terrorist acts of violence occurring within his diocese, but has not and would not see it as his role to urge his parishioners or the SDLP to support the security forces.

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MAY 1979

THE MAZE PROTEST

The Archbishop's visit to Maze on 30 July 1978

On 30 July 1978 Archbishop O'Flaich made a pastoral visit to Maze Prison. Following the visit he issued a press statement in which he described the conditions in the protesters' block as "unfit for animals". On 1 August the Northern Ireland Office issued a press statement countering the Archbishop's allegations and pointing out that the prisoners' conditions were entirely their own making.

The present situation in the protesting blocks

2. There are now (2 July) 358 prisoners taking part in the dirty protest, compared with 307 when the Archbishop made his visit last year. The number on the protest has remained fairly constant since the beginning of 1979 (354 at the beginning of January). So far during the year about 40 have abandoned the dirty protest and returned to a normal prison regime.

3. The cleaning operations in the dirty blocks have been stepped up considerably since the Archbishop's visit last July. Each cell is now being cleaned about every 9 days, and the cells are being painted with emulsion paint after every fourth cleaning. The result is while the cells are still being fouled with excrement and waste food, they are not by any means as dirty as when the Archbishop saw them.

4. Five of the dirty protesters have been released having completed their sentences. The condition of those who took part in televised interviews after their release gave no support to allegations, which are part and parcel of the Provisional IRA's propaganda campaign. The Governor of the prison and his staff are continuing to deal with this provocative form of protest action in a restrained and humane manner.

5. The medical and public health aspects of the protest continue to be closely watched. The health of the prisoners remains remarkably good. No prisoner has been found to be suffering from any form of illness, physical or mental, attributable to the conditions which the prisoners have created for themselves.

Line to Take

6. On the central issue of special category status this Government like the last - is determined to phase out special treatment, whatever it might be called, for persons convicted of criminal offences through the courts. Disciplinary procedures under Prison Rules must continue. There is no room for compromise here, and there will be no amnesty for persons convicted of offences - for whatever alleged reason the crimes were committed.

7. It is tragic that the protesting prisoners (only about 15% of the population of sentenced prisoners) are continuing with this pointless protest; in so doing they are causing a great deal of anxiety to their families and friends. Those prisoners who are conforming with the Rules have available to them a wide range of facilities for work, education and recreation which compare very favourably with those in the rest of the United Kingdom.