

H. Loughridge? Mr Regan
M. Kelly 12/11

To see + have files
H. Regan/11/15

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

1985
2/2/97

cc PS/Minister
Secretary ✓
Mr Dillon

Mr Regan

1985
25 NOV 1985

RECEIVED
SECRETARY'S OFFICE
31 OCT 1985
1693.
Dept. of the Environment

7 NOV 1985
Mr Rodgers
for info.

MR SIMPSON:

DIVIS

To see and retain this note of the Minister's meeting with Bishop Daly.

I do not think that para 7 captures entirely the flavour of what the Bishop said about Milford. My recollection is that the Bishop made the point that the Milford pilot scheme was seen by residents as the thin edge of the wedge. Acquiescence to its refurbishment would be taken as acceptance of the overall plan to demolish only two blocks and patch and mend the rest with the bulk of the population of Divis "condemned" to live there for the rest of their lives. He understood readily that the whole of Divis could not be removed within months or even a short span of years but if total demolition was accepted by Government and the Housing Executive as the ultimate goal with its achievement dependent upon the solution of the 'land for public housing in West Belfast' problem then he believed that residents would accept refurbishment as an interim measure and would be keen to see the results in one pilot scheme eg at Milford. The Minister's counter on this point was that if we talked about eventual total demolition we would be pressed for a timescale and, if we gave a timescale, for a shortening of it and the current sanction of refusing the refurbishment would be very likely to be applied until a timescale acceptable to the Residents Association was given; this was physically impossible. Bishop Daly did not respond on this point.

It is also worth recording that the Bishop alluded to consideration being given by the RC Church authorities to ways in which they could use land in their ownership for housing purposes. He did not elaborate but my understanding based on other contacts which I have - and discussions which the Housing Executive has had with a "go-between"- is that consideration is being given to the formation of a Housing Association which would address the problem of rehousing the tenants of Divis. The plan apparently would be to demand the demolition of the flats with the land to be handed over to the Association and they would use this land together with other parcels in the Church's ownership (McRory Park, Stewartstown Road etc) to provide houses for the current tenants of Divis (or the socially acceptable element). I believe the plan has not been thought through but it is a straw in the wind. How the Bishop (or his surrogates) would go about ensuring that the Housing Association was not controlled by the same elements who control Divis Tenants Association while giving the tenants a large degree of control of their destinies would be interesting (we could of course be drawn in if asked to register the Association). How it would be funded (I presume the Church would wish it to be registered and funded as a registered Association), how it would decide and control allocations (bearing in mind that only one-third of current residents of Divis could be rehoused there) etc would all be interesting points. We can only wait and see what develops on this front.

Meanwhile Victor Blease and Billy McGivern are getting involved in discussions about Divis (Victor claimed that the recent and very lucid and helpful leader in the Belfast Telegraph was written by Barry White after a long discussion with Billy McGivern) with various people and Victor is discussing with his Chairman

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whether a discussion with the Bishop on the perceived shortcomings of the Executive in its landlord role would be advisable and helpful. He will keep me informed.

F McCANN
31 October 1985

ENC

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26/1/91