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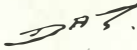
SECRET

Discussion with John Hume,
29th November, 1990

1. John Hume made contact briefly on Thursday evening to fill me in on his meeting the previous day with Gerry Adams. He said he will take an early opportunity to brief the Taoiseach in private on the meeting - the other SDLP members are not aware, according to Hume, of these on-going discussions. (Hume is also to meet the Secretary of State privately tomorrow afternoon to brief him).
2. Hume said his meeting with Adams had been very constructive. The Sinn Féin leader categorically stated that he was very interested in discussing an alternative strategy to violence. If he was convinced that the South was serious, and it was possible to devise such an alternative strategy, he would be prepared to go to the Army Council and argue in support of this approach.
3. In a brief discussion on Friday with John Chilcot, the Permanent Under Secretary at the NIO, I asked him if he had detected any change in the attitude of the Provisionals in the light of the Brooke statement of the 7th November. In response, Chilcot said that he was beginning to believe that the Provisionals were now serious in being prepared to consider all the options open to them. He referred in particular to the article by Fr. Alex Reid in the Irish Times on Thursday and said he saw this as being particularly significant. (This is indeed an article which merits careful reading; Fr. Reid, who is extremely close to Gerry Adams, said he believed that "the Republican movement could be persuaded to end its strategy of armed force in favour of a strategy of political force", and that "the tragic and violent dimensions of what is essentially a political conflict could be ended, as far as the nationalist side of it is concerned, within any given six-month period,

provided it were handled properly"; a copy of the article is enclosed).

4. Chilcot said he would like to meet me privately at some stage for a discussion - though he added that he might not be able to "tell me everything" he knows (he seemed to be implying that he would wish in particular to talk about the manner in which recent signals from the Provisionals might be interpreted).



Dermot Gallagher,
3 December, 1990.

cc: PST; PSM; Mr. Nally; PSS; Ms. Anderson.

The Rev Alex Reid, who made headlines when he administered the last rites to the two British soldiers killed by a crowd in Andersonstown in 1988 and who has himself been at the centre of mediation efforts between Belfast paramilitaries for the past 20 years, explains why he thinks the violence in the North could be ended within six months if the situation were handled properly

Priest feels Church must provide talks channel for IRA

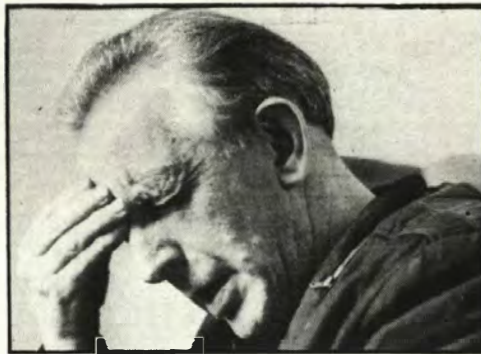
AS A PRIEST who has worked in Belfast since the 1960s, my main concern is not about the political dimensions of the Northern Ireland conflict but about the tragedy it is causing in terms of human life and human suffering. It is no exaggeration to say that the people of the north have been deluged by pain and sorrow over the past 21 years and that they are still enduring a nightmare of horror, agony and tragedy.

It is natural to ask how all this could happen in a Christian country and among a people whom, in both their unionist and nationalist traditions, are I believe, (and here I speak from long, personal experience) as God-fearing, as kind, as warm-hearted, as law-abiding, as hard-working, as sensitive, as gifted intellectually and emotionally as any people on this earth.

The saddest tragedy of all is that the conflict between the British unionist tradition and the Irish nationalist tradition need not and would not have erupted into violence, bloodshed and tragedy 21 years ago if the situation had been handled properly at the time.

More than this, I believe, that, even now, the violent, tragic dimensions of the conflict could be ended within any given six month period provided the situation were handled properly. I also believe that, although it has lasted for centuries, the political conflict between the Irish nationalist and the British unionist traditions could be ended within a reasonable period provided it is handled in accordance with the principles of democratic justice and charity as these principles are understood and practised throughout the world.

What are the democratic rights of the people of Ireland given that history has divided them into the people of the unionist tradition and the people of the nationalist tradition? How do you apply the principles of democracy to the present conflict especially at the point where British unionists say that Northern Ireland should be united to Britain and under British jurisdiction because this is the political wish of the majority of the people who live there,



Father Alex Reid believes the Catholic Church must intervene to provide the kind of "sanctuary setting" where lines of communication with the IRA can be set up and maintained.

namely, the people of the unionist tradition while, at the same time, Irish nationalists say that Northern Ireland should be re-united to the rest of Ireland and under Irish jurisdiction because this is the political wish of the majority of the people who live in Ireland as a whole, namely, the people of the nationalist tradition.

These are the kind of questions which the conflict asks of everybody who wants to end it justly and democratically. Can such questions be answered? I am certain they can provided we go to the heart of what democracy means and there listen to what it tells us about the just, political and human rights of all the people of Ireland in their two divided traditions.

Why, over the past 21 years, has the conflict become so violent? The answer to this question lies in the fact that both traditions have been and still are prepared to use military force to back their own answers to the kind of democratic questions I have just been asking. Here, however, I shall concentrate on attitudes to the use of military force within the nationalist tradition because, as a priest, my main pastoral responsibilities are towards the people of that tradition and also because it will help explain why there is so much bloodshed and tragedy.

As we know, the majority of

the people of the nationalist tradition have long ago rejected the use of military force as a means of achieving their political aims, that is, as a means of ending British rule in what they see as the northern part of their country. They have decided that they will use only political and diplomatic methods to achieve this.

There is, however, within the nationalist tradition, an historical heritage going back, at least, to the French Revolution and embodied today in the Republican movement which still believes what Irish Republicans generally used to but no longer believe, namely, that the people of Ireland have the right to use military force to resist and to end British rule and a British Government presence in any part of Ireland including Northern Ireland because, as they see it, this rule is a violation of the democratic right of the people of Ireland to rule themselves.

In spite of the opposition of majority nationalist opinion and of the continual condemnations of Church and State, the Republican movement, represented today by the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Féin, is still convinced that it is entitled to take up arms to achieve the traditional aims of Irish nationalism. At the same time, however, those who belong to this movement are also con-

vinced that their kind of armed force could not by itself achieve these aims and, for that reason, that political methods must also be used.

What they are really talking about is pressuring the British in an efficacious way. They are saying, in effect, that they are using armed force not because they want to but because, as they see the situation, they have to; that, for them, it is simply a pressure tactic which, however unfortunate, is nevertheless necessary under present political circumstances in Ireland. If, as they say, armed force is simply a tactic to pressure the British authorities into giving the people of Ireland their democratic rights, then you can immediately enter into a dialogue with them about replacing the pressure and efficacy of armed and violent force with the pressure and efficacy of political and diplomatic force.

A very significant fact here is that the present political leaders of the Republican movement have been publicly requesting such a dialogue for several years now and two years ago its military leaders issued a statement saying they were willing to consider proposals for "an alternative" to "the armed struggle" for Irish independence.

I am pointing out all this to explain why I believe the tragic and violent dimensions of what is essentially a political conflict could be ended, as far as the nationalist side of it is concerned, within any given six-month period provided it were handled properly. But it would have to be handled properly, patiently and with diplomatic skill because the people of the Republican movement who are still committed to the use of armed force belong to a military tradition that goes back for centuries and that numbers among its adherents and supporters some of the greatest heroes of Irish history.

This means that Republican convictions about the need and the justification for armed force have been handed down from generation to generation, from father to son and mother to daughter like a religious faith and so they are deeply felt and held in the hearts of Republicans.

This account of Republican convictions will, I hope, help to explain why Church condemna-

tions of political violence in Ireland, which have been repeated again and again over the past 21 years, have not been heeded by the Republican movement and why even the passionate plea of Pope John Paul in 1979 to end the use of force for political ends was ignored.

The strange thing about all this is that, apart from their refusal to accept Church guidance on the use of arms in the cause of Irish independence, Republicans are often faithful Catholics in every other way, faithful to the Church's teachings and practices and very loyal to the Pope and to the supremacy of Rome as the See of Peter. I believe, indeed, that many Republicans would lay down their lives for their faith as quickly as they would for their republicanism.

Why, then, do they refuse to accept the Irish bishops' and even the Pope's condemnations of their "armed struggle"? There are a number of reasons but here I shall mention just one.

This is that the Catholic Church and the Republican movement have been encountering each other for a long time in Ireland, for centuries in fact. Republicans have learned a lot of lessons from their quarrel with the Church about the use of arms: lessons, for example, about how bishops can be affected by their own political and social backgrounds and about how the official Church



A British soldier being cornered by mourners at the IRA funeral in Andersonstown in 1988 at which he and another British soldier were killed. Father Reid, author of this article, administered the last rites to the two men.

in which a significant section of the people for whom they have pastoral responsibility have taken up arms to achieve their political aims in the spirit and with the commitment and expertise of a military tradition that goes back for centuries. They have to respond to the fact that in spite of all the efforts of Church and State to persuade them to stop or to defeat them — the use of constant condemnation by the Church; the application of all the security, military and legal resources available to the London and Dublin Governments — they are continuing to use arms today.

What, in face of such a situation, should the Church do or, at least, try to do through her representatives and ministers? It is clear that, while she must give guidance on the moral issues of the conflict, pulpit-type condemnations are not enough.

Here, I believe, we can learn from the pastoral example of

indicates, I believe, that the Church must enter into direct communication and dialogue with the Republican movement if she wants to persuade it to abandon the gun and to follow the ways of peaceful politics. My own experience has taught me that, if the Church does this, she will find that the Republican movement is open, not only to such communication and dialogue, but also to such persuasion.

I believe, for example, that given the necessary communication with the other political parties or authorities that would be concerned, the Republican movement could be persuaded to end its strategy of armed force in favour of a strategy of political force or even of new, realistic ways of defining and applying the democratic principles that should govern the just resolution of the present conflict.

I am convinced, however, that the Republican movement will not be persuaded to give up its armed strategy for a political strategy unless it has first been satisfied that such a strategy would be organised enough and strong enough to pursue effectively the broad thrust of the traditional aims of Irish nationalism in the political setting of the 1990s. Such an efficacious political strategy could, I believe, be set up but only if the main political parties on the nationalist side of the conflict and the main Republican movement agree to pursue it together because only then would it have the kind of political force behind it that would satisfy the Republican movement.

At the present time, however, there is no communication between the main nationalist parties and the Republican movement because these parties refuse to communicate with it while it is engaged in an armed campaign. This means that a political strategy acceptable to the Republican

movement as a replacement for its armed strategy cannot be organised at present and will not be unless and until the necessary lines of communication between it and the other nationalist parties are set up. Here the Church could play a crucial role because, for pastoral and moral reasons, she could and, I believe, should intervene to facilitate the creation and the organisation of these lines of communication and, by doing so, help to promote a dialogue which, at the end of the day, would, I am convinced, remove the gun forever from the nationalist side of the age-old conflict in Ireland.

I can sum up all this by saying that there is a tragic impasse at the heart of the peace-making process in Northern Ireland. It has been created, on the one hand, by the insistence of the Republican movement that it cannot and will not lay down its arms in favour of any new proposals for justice, reconciliation and peace unless and until it has been able to verify the political viability of such proposals through unconditional communication with the other political parties and authorities who would be involved in implementing them. On the other hand, it has been caused by the insistence of these parties and authorities that they cannot and will not engage in any kind of political communication with the Republican movement unless and until it lays down its arms.

How to resolve this impasse is, therefore, one of the crucial questions for peace in Northern Ireland. My own conviction is that it cannot and will not be resolved unless and until the Church, in keeping with her pastoral responsibilities in any situation of violent conflict, intervenes, through her representatives and ministers, to provide the kind of sanctuary setting where the lines of communication necessary to resolve it can be set up and maintained.

'Republicans have historical memories about the Church's attitude to political questions in the past . . .'

can differ from the pastoral Church: lessons even about the fallibility of the Church in matters that belong, not to the sphere of faith, but to the sphere of prudential and personal judgement. Republicans have historical memories about the Church's attitudes to political questions in the past, even the distant past; memories that tend to disillusion them. The democratic principles of republicanism have taught them to think for themselves and to be independent of mind in matters of personal conscience.

Priests in Northern Ireland must, therefore, face a situation

Jesus Himself. He is always "the Lord who is with us", the Saviour who is "in the midst", the Friend who is "like unto us in all things except sin." He communicated directly with those whom He wished to influence including people who were condemned by the official Church of the time as the worst of sinners and outlaws. He sat down to table with them and engaged them in personal dialogue so often and so much that He became known by what I believe is His greatest title — "The Companion of Sinners" — of the sinners that we all are.

The pastoral approach of Jesus