



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Conversation with Fr John Murphy, Catholic Chaplain
The Maze Prison, 13 September 1990.

Chaplains Initiative on paramilitary talks:

I had a brief conversation with Fr Murphy who provided an update of the progress of the initiative undertaken by the Catholic and Church of Ireland Chaplains in the Maze.

Background:

You will recall that for the past two years the Chaplains have, with the support of the four Church leaders (O' Fiaich, Eames, Cahal Daly and Poyntz) held a series of talks with the leaderships of the UVF and the IRA both inside and outside the prison. The objective of the initiative is to get agreement on a cessation of the campaign of violence by persuading the paramilitaries that the political road offers a real and effective alternative.

As reported previously, the initiative culminated in a meeting on 1 May between the Secretary of State and Cardinal O' Fiaich and Archbishop Eames where the two Church leaders conveyed the message that the IRA are prepared to enter talks with the British (either openly or in secret) and that such talks, if judged "meaningful" by the IRA, would lead to a laying down of arms.

The sudden death of the Cardinal shortly after that meeting left control of the initiative in the hands of Eames who appears to have indulged in a certain amount of prevarication with the Chaplains and the other Church leaders involved.

Recent Developments:

Bishop Daly on his own initiative recently met with the Secretary of State in order to restate his view that this initiative may offer a real hope of bringing the campaign of violence to an end. The Secretary of State was accompanied at the meeting by John McConnell of the Political Affairs section of the NIO. Apparently Brooke expressed interest in the possibilities and a week later, the Bishop was called by the Permanent Under Secretary of the NIO (Sir John Bileloch) to a further meeting. That meeting involved Bileloch, McConnell and the Bishop.

Fr Murphy knows Blelloch of old - Murphy and Blelloch were the key people involved in the negotiations surrounding the 1981 hunger-strike and have maintained a fairly close relationship since then. At the meeting Blelloch apparently questioned all aspects of the initiative and adopted a generally negative tone. Murphy is in no way discouraged by this - describing it as Blelloch's usual style. [He commented that on many occasions in the past, Blelloch has adopted similar stances with him on various suggestions which Fr Murphy has made in relation to the Maze. However, Fr Murphy found that his suggestions have on most occasions been implemented by the NIO shortly after his sometimes stormy meetings with Blelloch.]

As an aside, Fr Murphy mentioned that Blelloch made no mention of the "old chestnut" of wanting to know the names of the Chaplains' interlocutors in the IRA. (Bishop Daly had again turned down this suggestion made by Brooke in order to test whether the Chaplains' interlocutors really represented the Army Council.) Fr Murphy commented that Blelloch knows fine well that he is conducting the initiative, knows Fr Murphy's form from the hunger-strike negotiations, and realises that the question is unnecessary.

Archbishop Eames has arranged for a meeting on 20 September involving the sponsors of this initiative (Fr Murphy, Rev Will Murphy, Bishop Cahal Daly and Bishop Poyntz) to receive a briefing from Bishop Daly on these latest meetings and to decide on how best to proceed. (Unfortunately neither Fr Murphy nor Bishop Poyntz will be in the country at the time so that the meeting will be attended by the remaining three participants.) Fr Murphy commented on Eames' own unionist agenda and wondered whether, now that the initiative was beginning to enter uncharted waters, Eames would begin to distance himself from the initiative or indeed jump ship altogether.

His own feeling is that after the meeting on the 20th, there will have to be a further meeting with the IRA Army Council, following which they will again meet with Blelloch.

Comment:

The meeting with Fr Murphy was of necessity a brief one on this occasion (he was on his way to catch a plane) so that I was unable to probe him in sufficient detail. However, he was quite upbeat and from the account which he gave, it would appear that Bishop Daly has managed to re-launch the initiative following the prevarication of Archbishop Eames after the 1 May meeting. The fact that Blelloch has been assigned the task of probing the issue would appear to indicate some level of interest (as yet undefined) on the part of the British in the possibilities. [Certainly, as far as Fr Murphy is concerned, it contradicts Archbishop Eames' assertions that at the 1 May meeting, the Secretary of State had indicated that the matter would have to be put on the back-burner.]

Bredu 7.7.5

Brendan McMahon
Anglo-Irish Division
14 September 1990

cc A/Sec Gallagher
R. Murphy