



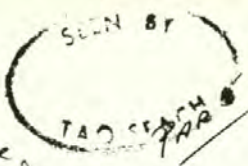
## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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| <b>Reference Code:</b>       | 2021/93/9  |
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**SECRET**

A/Sec Gallagher

*Taorigh  
7 re please  
11/2. JH*



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*cc PST; ARM  
Hault; ASR  
Ala. Ande*

Maze Chaplains' initiative on paramilitary talks.  
Conversation with Fr John Murphy. 31 January 1991.

*h. by [unclear]  
m. Krowan 13/1/91  
12/2*

**Background**

1. This initiative has been conducted by the Catholic and Church of Ireland Chaplains in the Maze (both named Murphy) over the past two years and has, from the outset, had the support of four Church Leaders (O Fiaich, Eames, Cahal Daly and Poyntz). On the basis of recommendations made by the Chaplains, Cardinal O Fiaich and Archbishop Eames met with the Secretary of State on 1 May last to indicate that the Army Council of the IRA would be prepared to enter into secret talks with the British which, if judged "meaningful", would result in a cessation of violence.
2. Since that date, there have been a series of separate meetings between the Chaplains and (a) two designated members of the Army Council; and (b) Danny McNeill of the Political Affairs Division of the NIO.

**Recent Developments**

3. As indicated in previous reports, the British have recently had an approach (presumably from Fr. Reid) which suggests the holding of talks with Sinn Fein. In this regard, Fr. Murphy had the impression from his most

recent meeting with McNeill that the British may be more attracted to this option (i.e. as against direct talks with the IRA). At the same time, the NIO also seem to want to keep the Chaplains' initiative in play.

4. Murphy, although irritated by the above development, recognises the relative attractiveness for the British of the Sinn Féin option - given that the party has an electoral mandate. However, his belief (which is strongly held) is that working through Sinn Féin, while it has the potential to be successful, will mean that the process will have to be over a much longer timescale than if talks took place directly with the IRA - "years as against weeks".
5. The present promoters of the initiative (Archbishop Daly, Archbishop Eames, Bishop Poyntz and the two Chaplains) met on 25 January to review progress. The meeting shared a general sense that they were "being messed about by the British" and, as a consequence, a decision was taken to go over the head of the Secretary of State to the Prime Minister. The two Archbishops then and there, therefore, drafted and signed a letter to the Prime Minister seeking a meeting with him to discuss the initiative.
6. The letter had a fairly immediate impact - McNeill phoned Murphy on the 29th January, apparently in a state of some anxiety, and sought an immediate meeting with the Chaplains. That meeting, which Murphy predicted would be stormy, was to be held on 1 February.

Other Aspects

7. In the early stages of the initiative, the British had cast doubts on the bona fides of the Chaplains' interlocutors from the IRA. However, in a recent brief conversation with Archbishop Eames, Peter Brooke both expressed himself as happy with the initiative and confident that the Chaplains were talking to the right people.
8. Fr Murphy understands from the Governor in the Maze that IRA prisoners are currently being canvassed by the Army Council on future strategy. In this regard, we have also heard that there has been a similar sounding out of IRA personnel in British prisons recently.

Comment

9. It is interesting that Archbishop Eames now seems to be fully supportive of the initiative. I queried Murphy about the reasons for this new-found enthusiasm - which is presumably based on Eames' present assessment of the initiative. However, Murphy refused to respond and said he would not go into any detail on what might (or might not) be on offer from the IRA in any talks process.

[Note: Murphy is cautious about how much he tells us and is particularly paranoid at the possibility of any leakage of information on the initiative. While Archbishop Daly is aware that Murphy is keeping us briefed on the initiative, this is not known to the Church of Ireland side; according to Murphy, Eames at one stage during the meeting on the 25th, had wondered

aloud "if Dublin are aware of this" while at the same time turning around in his chair to look somewhat pointedly at Fr Murphy].

RS-

Brendan McMahon,  
Anglo-Irish Division,  
1 February 1991.