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HCS/475/93

FROM: D FELL
3 JUNE 1993



cc

Mr Ledlie o/r
Mr Steele
Mr Watkins

11/6

77/6

PUS (L&B)

THE BEECHMOUNT FIVE

You will wish to see John Ledlie's attached minute of 27 May to Simon Marsh. John agreed before departing on a week's leave that I should copy the minute to you.

It is, in such cases, important to keep a sense of perspective, and to avoid jumping to unjustified conclusions based on assertions of innocence. That said, I find the contents of John's note quite disturbing, and share his sense of concern. If this sort of perception of the RUC is at all widespread - and the evidence seems to suggest it is - then the opportunities which may be opening up for us to seek to identify remedies may offer a fairly rare chance to take appropriate action. In this context, you will also be interested in the marked paragraph of the Irish News editorial of 27 May.

DAVID FELL

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USB/3685/30A

FROM: J K LEDLIE
27 May 1993

cc Mr Fell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Steele - B

MR MARSH - B

THE BEECHMOUNT FIVE

This is just to report that I went down yesterday to the offices of the CAJ to meet with the parents (4 mothers and 2 fathers) of the Beechmount Five - the five young men currently in the dock in Crumlin Road for murder and associated charges connected with the assassination of Sergeant Gillespie in Beechmount Avenue on 1 May 1991 (the trial, as you know, started a few weeks ago under Mr Justice Shiels - after the accused had spent almost two years on remand in Belfast Prison).

2. For me, the occasion was a fascinating, instructive and moving one. It is not often that we have the chance to meet and talk to the authentic voice of middle-aged West Belfast; and the exchange reminded me, yet again I am afraid, of how far the RUC still have to go in even beginning to convince such people that they operate in an even-handed and unbiased way. The parents (led by the very likeable Margaret Hillick) were dignified and credible people; and it accordingly made me even more ashamed to have to try to explain and defend attitudes and practices which, if they are true, reflect - to put it mildly - unprofessional police conduct.

3. The parents' main complaints are, as I expect you know, centred around two areas:-

- (a) the physical and mental abuse to which their sons were subjected in Castlereagh;

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- (b) their certain knowledge (as they put it) that their sons are innocent of involvement in the RPG attack on the RUC landrover, and now stand to be unjustly convicted.

We discussed, in some detail, some of the aspects of both these issues; and what I heard was absorbing - and often disturbing. I can well understand why these cases have attracted so much attention (particularly - and sadly so - on the other side of the Atlantic); and the damage caused to the credibility of the RUC in West Belfast is enormous. (As I expect you know, some policemen are said to share the widespread community view that these young men are innocent and have been framed as part of a vindictive conspiracy on the part of certain RUC officers who were determined to "pay the community back" for Gillespie's death.)

5. There is, of course, no formal action for us in the NIO to take - either now or indeed at the conclusion of the trial (which may not be until the autumn). I explained, many times, to Mrs Hillick and her colleagues that I had no part in, nor could bring any influence to bear on, the independent police, prosecution or judicial processes now in play; and the parents entirely accepted this. But if we are serious about being interested in improving the confidence of the nationalist community in the administration of justice and the security forces, then such cases should concern us deeply.

Signed JKL

J K LEDLIE
Ext 28138

ID 45866

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