

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

at Peter's pm.



CONFIDENTIAL

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

William Rickett Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

24 August 1981

Prime Minister

2

This is now slightly out of date, but
you may wish to see it.

Wh
26/8

Dear Willie

You asked for a note on the Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-election and its consequences. This follows: but I am taking the opportunity to bring the position as summarised in my letter of 14 August up to date.

Owen Carron, standing on an anti-H-block ticket, won the Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-election with 31,278 votes against the 29,048 votes polled by his strongest opponent, Ken Maginnis of the Official Unionists. Despite the presence of two other moderate Northern Ireland candidates, and two maverick English ones who polled some 4,000 votes between the four of them, Carron exceeded both the vote and the margin of victory achieved by Sands last April; 31,278 against 30,492, and 2,230 against 1,446 respectively.

Unlike Sands's election, this result did not come as a major shock. Carron assumed the anti-Unionist mantle in the main Orange/Green battle - the paramount issue in this border constituency; he embodied the alienation which has built up amongst Catholics in the wake of the Government's firm stance on the hunger strike; and he played skilfully upon Maginnis's previous membership of the UDR to ensure that Catholics voted for him in order to "keep the other side out".

The immediate reactions were "that's the way things are" on the part of most Nationalists, and outrage on the part of Unionists, shocked once again at how Catholics would vote for someone who, in their eyes, was so clearly an IRA supporter. There was considerable acrimony over intimidation and personation which has done little to reduce the temperature. The effects will be both immediate and longer-term. Moderate Unionists feel let down by the Catholic population; extreme ones see the results as further confirmation of their worst suspicions. H-Block supporters view the result as a clear vindication of their campaign and another major world-wide publicity coup; the SDLP must face up to fundamental issues if they are to have any real chance of surviving as a non-sectarian moderate party. The speculation that PSF might run against them in West Belfast and other constituencies where the anti-Unionist might have a chance will bring them little joy.

CONFIDENTIAL

/...

CONFIDENTIAL

These are the preceptions in the Northern Ireland community. For our part we would be wise to see the Catholic vote as anti-Unionist and Protestant ascendancy rather than pro-PIRA, and as for the Republican and United Ireland ideals as distinct from the methods by which some choose to pursue them. That said, there is no doubt of the powerful emotional pull in the minority community of the hunger strike in support of a "cause", however misguided (and however serious the previous crimes of those involved). Devine's death on polling day was a pointed reminder.

The Provisionals will seek to use Carron's election for propaganda and to exert leverage on the Government's position. That being so, we must, as has been done, continue steadily to maintain that the five demands are not, even after the by-election, a matter for concession or negotiation. But we need to be careful of attracting, through our handling of him, the criticism that the Government acknowledges the democratic process only when it suits them. Further, he offers a means of communication through which the Government's position can be re-asserted both openly, and probably without the distortions we have learned to expect from other intermediaries (he was a reliable and discreet contact in setting up the arrangements for the visit of the 3 TDs last April). We suggest that if he asks for a meeting then the request be handled in that light. The Prime Minister would presumably not wish to see him in any case: Mr Alison would be prepared to do so provided Carron does not impose silly conditions beforehand.

Inside the Maze, McKeown has been on strike for 57 days but his condition is not yet critical. Members of his family have indicated that they would act if he went into a coma and have not retracted that: they could, of course, still do so. The next (Devlin) is about a fortnight behind and a 6th (Fox), as reported in the Press, joined the hunger strike this morning. The ex-hunger striker Quinn continues to do well as does McGeown (not to be confused with McKeown above) who has now left intensive care and joined him in the secure wing of the Musgrave Park Hospital. Outside the prison the last (Protestant) event of the marching season takes place on 30 August. The disturbances in Belfast and Londonderry on the night of 21/22 August were contained by the security forces and were, broadly, at the reduced level (compared with Sands) we had come to expect. The two bombs on Saturday 22 August were not altogether unexpected in that there had been previous intelligence to suggest that PIRA were planning further bombings, and reports of movement of explosives. Bangor and Belfast had both been suggested as possible targets. As the bombs were in "Loyalist" areas the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commandos are likely to retaliate with random, sectarian shootings, although the possibility of counter-bombing Catholic areas cannot be discounted. The Ulster Defence Association has drawn up plans for the renewal of its attempts to assassinate leading Republicans in Northern Ireland.

Elsewhere, we await the outcome of the Dublin Ministerial meetings today and tomorrow though in the meantime overseas posts have been

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

given up-to-date briefing (FCO telegrams 119 and 120 of 20 August). Father Helmick saw officials last Tuesday but it does not look as if his ideas will in fact take things forward. Neither do those communicated through the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Prime Minister, as he acknowledges: substantive advice is being prepared separately. We do not yet have a firm forecast for when the ICRC's report will arrive. But it is not likely now to be until some time next month.

The right course remains to see how these various possibilities (Dublin, ICRC, Carron) develop, and to be ready to react quickly if necessary.

I am copying this letter to Roderic Lyne (FCO).

*Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins*

M W HOPKINS

CONFIDENTIAL