



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting with Bishop Cathal Daly, Belfast,  
4 February 1987

I called on Bishop Cathal Daly at his residence in Belfast on 4 February.

Among the points which arose were the following:

Provisional IRA

The Bishop has picked up a rumour that Gerry Adams is currently trying to put together a set of proposals which would enable the Provisional IRA to call a halt to their paramilitary campaign. He has reached the view that the 'armed struggle' is getting nowhere, that it has become a political liability to Sinn Fein both North and South and that, as long as it continues, there is little chance that he will be able to realise his own political ambitions. What he is believed to be working on is some form of 'declaration of intent' to withdraw, with however long a timescale, on the part of the British Government. If he managed to negotiate something of this kind, the Provisional IRA would be able to lay down their arms without much loss of face, claiming that they had achieved the breakthrough towards which all their efforts had been directed.

While recognising his intelligence and political abilities, Bishop Daly spoke with some vehemence of Adams' deviousness and fundamental untrustworthiness. He recalled that about two years ago Adams tried to obtain a meeting with the Bishop, arguing that it was natural for the political and religious leaders of West Belfast to get together. After some "agonising", the Bishop refused the request. He argued that in the interests of Church/State separation it was not his policy

to meet the leaders of the political parties - he had never met Hume, Cushnahan, Molyneaux or Paisley and was not going to start with Adams. He would see Adams only as a private individual. The latter, of course, wanted to see him as President of Sinn Fein. Bishop Daly regarded the episode as an attempt on the part of Adams to enlist the Church as an ally for Sinn Fein's various campaigns. The Bishop was determined not to go along with this and to do nothing which could enhance the status and self-importance of Sinn Fein. In this connection, he noted with disapproval that a Labour Party delegation recently met Sinn Fein in Belfast.

#### West Belfast

In the same general context the Bishop referred scathingly to Joe Hendron's candidature in West Belfast. Hendron should stand down as the SDLP candidate. Though a nice man in personal terms the SDLP man has no "political savvy", he has done next to no constituency work in West Belfast and the effect of his campaign will be to "hand the seat to Gerry Adams on a plate". Sinn Fein will win West Belfast "by default". This, in the Bishop's view, will be a "tragedy" - especially as, with another candidate (he did not suggest names), the SDLP would have a good chance of defeating Adams. The problem is that Hume, as a Derryman, has never fully recognised the importance of West Belfast.

#### RUC

Referring to the remarks made by Cardinal O Fiaich on the subject of nationalists joining the RUC, the Bishop said he thought that the Cardinal had been quoted out of context. He had basically been saying not that Catholics should not join the RUC but that, in his view, they would not do so until

matters such as the Stalker affair had been cleared up. Furthermore, the Cardinal had acknowledged one or two positive developments in relation to the RUC.

Observing that Seamus Mallon "had no option but to stick to what he had said in the past", Bishop Daly went on to suggest nevertheless that one very important way of making the RUC more acceptable to nationalists would be to increase the percentage of Catholics in the force. He noted, furthermore, that this objective was explicitly stated in Art. 7(c) of the Agreement. He therefore felt (though he stated this in muted terms) that it had been quite in order for the Tanaiste to invite nationalists publicly to join the RUC.

On the other hand, the Bishop was very critical of what he termed the Chief Constable's "P.R. approach" in regard to Catholic membership of the RUC. Hermon seemed to believe that people like himself and the Cardinal would be content if they saw Catholics occupying one or two senior positions in the force. The Chief Constable had on one occasion "boasted" to Bishop Daly that a Catholic (Cathal Ramsey) was in charge of all RUC operations in West Belfast. He had also made a point of sending round Ramsey to call on the Bishop from time to time. In the Bishop's view, however, this was the wrong approach. He had told Hermon that what would persuade Catholics to support, and join the RUC far more than the sight of a few hand-picked Catholics in senior positions would be "good, impartial, professional policing on the ground". Indeed, if this could be assured with Unionists rather than nationalists filling the senior ranks, the Bishop would be quite content. The problem, he told Hermon, had to be resolved not "from the top down" but "from the bottom up". It had not escaped the Bishop's attention, furthermore, that the presence of Cathal Ramsey at the helm of West Belfast operations had done nothing to prevent the killing of Sean Downes in Andersonstown in August 1984. Ramsey, the Bishop commented to me, was promoted "out of his turn - and beyond his abilities".

Bishop Daly was also critical of the RUC for failing to heed the advice of his clergy on the ground in West Belfast. He recalled the anger caused by the heavy security presence at two recent funerals in West Belfast. Matters had not improved at the Power/O'Reilly funeral - or, indeed, at the Mary McGlinchey funeral. He found it hard to accept that the RUC were sincerely committed to "community relations" when they consistently ignored the advice given by local clergy. There were also the obvious double standards in operation: a massive security turn out at nationalist funerals compared with the very light presence of the Bingham funeral. The Chief Constable would no doubt defend the latter decision on grounds of "expediency". While the Bishop had been prepared to accept this defence in the case of last summer's Garvaghy Road decision, he found it much less convincing in the case of the Bingham funeral.

I commented that the kind of problems which he had been talking about showed nevertheless that there was a need for close and continuing contact between the police on the one hand and the clergy and other responsible nationalist representatives on the other. The Bishop agreed with this. He hoped, however, that the RUC would in future act on whatever they heard from the clergy.

#### UDA document

While he found this an interesting development, the Bishop disapproved of the positive public response from both John Hume and the NIO. The SDLP leader should not have "played into the hands" of a paramilitary organisation. If the IRA's Army Council were to publish a set of proposals, would Hume rush into print to welcome them? It had been irresponsible of both Hume and the NIO to issue public statements in the matter.

Election campaign

Finally, the Bishop said he was glad to see that the parties contesting the election in the South had so far kept the Anglo-Irish Agreement out of the campaign. He recalled that he had issued a public plea to this effect early in the New Year.

*lol*

PP David Donoghue,  
6 February 1987.

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