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Meeting with Bishop Cathal Daly,
14 May 1987

Mr. O'Donovan and I met Bishop Cathal Daly, Bishop of Down and Connor, in Dublin today.

The following are the main points which arose in our discussion:

Loughgall

We briefed the Bishop on the Government's view of this event and said that it had asked through the Secretariat to be kept as fully informed as possible of the progress of the investigation.

The Bishop said that he would like the RUC to give a clear account in public of why the security forces acted as they did. While he does not realistically expect that the circumstances of the shootings will be disclosed in every detail, he believes that the nationalist community are entitled to an explanation, particularly in view of the more open attitude towards the media adopted by the Chief Constable of late. While a stake-out in the South (such as that which occurred at the time of the Weston kidnapping some years ago) would meet with general public acceptance, this is not the case in the North where nationalists continue to view the RUC with deep suspicion. (We pointed out, of course, that there had been no fatalities as a result of the Weston stake-out).

The Bishop did not, however, echo Fr. Denis Faul's question as to why the RUC could not have arrested the IRA group before they reached the police station. Noting that the group were equipped with a bomb which they subsequently detonated, he said that the initial violence came from the Provisional IRA.

The Bishop understands that there have been mixed reactions locally to the Loughgall shootings. He is aware, in fact, of a definite lack of sympathy with the Provos in some sections of the community. He does not believe that Loughgall will enter into Republican mythology, as some have suggested, or that it will have any long-term repercussions. "This will not become an epic".

The Bishop noted Seamus Mallon's careful, low-key reaction to the killings. Although Mallon lives only a few miles away, is the local MP and is facing into a general election, he refrained from denouncing the RUC, confining himself to condemnation of the Hughes killing only.

Funerals

The Bishop considers that the funerals in the aftermath of Loughgall passed off remarkably well. The police handled them with restraint and Sinn Fein were prevented from exploiting them for propaganda purposes. He is clearly pleased that the Chief Constable took his advice following the Marley funeral and that a new policy has been formulated with regard to the policing of funerals. The timing of the Chief Constable's statement on this subject (which appeared last Saturday) was "providential" as it just preceded a particularly ominous series of funerals. The Bishop believes that, if the RUC had repeated at this week's funerals the tactics they employed at the Marley funeral, a Sinn Fein victory in West Belfast at the forthcoming elections would be an absolute certainty.

While he regards the Emyvale incident as unfortunate, the Bishop is pleased with the way in which yesterday's funeral in Monaghan was handled by the police. He also commended the stance taken by Bishop Duffy and by the local clergy (and, by the same token, castigated the "outrageous" remarks made by Fr. Patrick Campbell at the O'Callaghan funeral). Regarding Gerry Adams' public rebuke to the priest officiating at Lynagh's funeral (Fr. Nolan) for failing to mention the circumstances of

Lynagh's death, the Bishop commented that open conflict between the Provos and the Church is not in the Provos' interests.

Recalling the Marley funeral, the Bishop said that he came under intense and orchestrated pressure to appear on the scene but, determined not to "dance to Sinn Fein's tune", refused to do so. When he heard that there was a guard of honour at the Marley home, he broke with his usual custom of visiting the deceased's home. He has noted that, since the funeral, Sinn Fein criticism of the Church in this regard has eased off.

West Belfast

In the Bishop's view, it is too early at this stage to predict the effect which the series of recent developments beginning with the Marley funeral will have on Sinn Fein's chances of retaining their seat in West Belfast. ("Three weeks is a long time in politics"). The boost to Sinn Fein's fortunes caused by the Marley funeral may have been offset by the adverse reactions in West Belfast to the two nights of rioting following the more recent McKenna funeral. It was noticeable that Adams felt it necessary to call on people to put an end to this mayhem. The Bishop expects that the Provos will scale down their violence in the interests of Adams' campaign. They recognise that "violence means no extra votes for them".

The Bishop has been sceptical for some time past about the SDLP's chances of winning West Belfast, particularly with Joe Hendron as candidate (rather than, say, Brian Feeney). The high level of unemployment and general economic and social deprivation of West Belfast have played to Sinn Fein's advantage and the SDLP has made little impact there. The net benefit to Sinn Fein from the recent developments, however, may not be as considerable as is feared. Loughgall, specifically, is likely to have very little impact on voters in West Belfast other than hardened Republicans).

RUC

The Bishop made the general comment that the RUC's attitude towards nationalists on the ground has barely improved, with the single and notable exception of the revised policy on funerals which is now in force. A meeting between West Belfast clergy and the Secretary of State is to take place next week and the Bishop (who is to meet his clergy beforehand) is certain that they will be making that point. (Note: A point regularly made by Bishop Daly, and which his clergy will no doubt echo, is that the RUC constantly seek the clergy's views on ways of improving police/community relations in West Belfast, yet when the clergy offer advice, this advice is more often than not ignored).

Anglo-Irish Agreement

The Bishop said he has been struck by the determined manner in which the Government has been availing of the Conference machinery since it took office.

David Donoghue

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