



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Conversation with the Bishop of Down and Connor

I met Bishop Daly in Belfast on the morning of 23 March 1988 to discuss recent events. He had just issued a statement (attached) which commanded wide media attention in Ireland and Britain. Its main points were:

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- a strong condemnation of the IRA ("for a ghastly half hour on Saturday the mask slipped"), a reference back to the Bishop's letter after Enniskillen in which they stated that it was sinful to join or remain in the IRA, a call to Catholics to leave the organisation, sympathy to non-IRA Catholics in West Belfast who have been "unjustly misrepresented to the world", a call to politicians to engage in talks, criticism of the British Government for "disastrously ill-judged decisions" which show little awareness of Irish sensitivities and rights, a call for Anglo-Irish relations to be placed once again on a basis of reciprocity and mutual trust, and a call for the regeneration of West Belfast which has been so long neglected.

The Bishop was somewhat concerned at the position in which the RUC and British opinion had sought to put him. He noted in particular the Prime Minister's comment that words of condemnation were not enough and that what was required was action.

He raised the sermons given at last week's funerals by Fr. Murray of Armagh and Frs. Denny and Toner which had been severely criticised in the British press and at Westminster. The Bishop said that Mr. King had telephoned him on Wednesday evening to say they were unhelpful. The Bishop said he had defended his priests (Fr. Toner and Fr. Denny) in public, but privately he regarded the remarks which gained publicity as "injudicious". He felt that Fr. Denny had allowed himself to appear to be excusing the violence of the IRA and Fr. Toner had

been wrong to equate what happened in Gibraltar with IRA murders of members of the security forces. (He mentioned that the Cardinal held the same view on the last point). As to Fr. Murray, the Bishop said that he had asked his parish priest in St. Oliver Plunkett's, Fr. Curry, to check the text of the sermon and he had been assured that there was no problem in it. The Cardinal had also checked the text and had found nothing objectionable apart from a quote from the Spanish newspaper El Pais which had accused the British of flouting both morality and law in Gibraltar. The Bishop said he could only assume therefore that Fr. Murray had ad libbed. In particular, he did not know where the reported comparison of the death of Mairead Farrell to the death of Jesus Christ had come from. He was satisfied that it was not in the prepared script. He has been besieged by media enquiries about it (it is referred to, for example, in the Daily Telegraph editorial of 23 March).

#### Contacts with King and Hermon

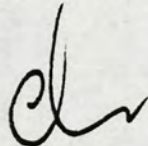
The Bishop gave further details on his contacts with Hermon and King last week (he had already given us a general outline by phone). He rang King on Monday to urge a "discreet" RUC presence at the Farrell/McCann/Savage funeral. He made it clear that he was satisfied that the IRA would not attempt any unlawful paramilitary display. King then encouraged him to speak to Hermon which he did on Tuesday. Hermon said he would think about it but remarked that he also had to consider the views of the Loyalist community. On Wednesday morning Hermon rang and spoke to the Bishop's secretary in the Bishop's absence in Maynooth. He asked if the assurances that had been passed to him still stood. He was told they did. He rang back a short time later to say that he had decided to "turn the security arrangements on their head" and that both the Army and Police would be "drawn well back".

I said we recognised Hermon's problem. If he did not have police present in force, security could not be maintained and

indeed small numbers of policemen might themselves be at risk of attack. However, there had to be a middle way. There could be adequate security to hand. We had urged restraint through the Secretariat in the context of hundreds of policemen in riot gear, surrounding the wakehouse, standing in people's gardens, pressing in on every side of the cortege and invading church precincts and cemeteries. It was remarkable that police and army had been drawn so far back that no security was visible at the funeral on Wednesday or again on Saturday despite Wednesday's experience. I asked if the Bishop thought that Hermon had taken the line "you can have my security or no security?" The Bishop thought this was quite likely. He said he did not trust the Chief Constable.

Mawhinney talks with Church leaders

I mentioned to the Bishop that the British wish to discuss at Friday's Conference how best to rally public opinion against violence and have told us of talks between Mawhinney and Church leaders. The Bishop said that the four Church leaders had met Ministers on the previous day when they had got together in Northern Ireland for another matter and that John McConnell of the NIO had organised a dinner for six of his priests at Stormont the previous evening. The Bishop had no information. He was somewhat dismissive of these talks saying they did not amount to much. He described the statement issued by the Church leaders as "bland, as these statements normally are".



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24 March 1988.

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