

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Memo.

*CO A-1 Section*  
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Bishop Mark Hurley from Santa Clara, California telephoned me this a.m. from the office of Bishop Edward Daly in Derry. He is the advance person for the delegation from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops which will visit Ireland in the week beginning 21 October 1984. He said he was telephoning because of our previous acquaintance - I met him a number of times in the US between 1978 and 1981 - and because he wished to discuss the possibility of meeting the Taoiseach and/or Irish Government officials. It is likely, however, that the main reason for the call was to discuss the issue of contact between the US bishops and Sinn Féin.

Bishop Hurley asked if a meeting with the Taoiseach might be possible. I said it was difficult to give firm commitments at this stage but that I had no doubt but that the Taoiseach would do his best to facilitate them. We agreed that he would block out the period from 12 noon to 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday 24 October for a meeting and lunch with Irish Government officials and tentatively agreed that their appointment would be at Government Buildings. Any change will be notified via Fr. Clyne, Cardinal Ó Fiaich's secretary at Ara Coeli, Armagh. The bishops plan to be in Dublin for part of that day only and wish also to pay a courtesy call on the President and meet the leader of Fianna Fáil.

Bishop Hurley went on to say that for the visit here the Irish bishops would be their hosts. The US bishops had already investigated situations in e.g. Central America, Poland, Afghanistan etc. and were coming under pressure from many Irish-American Catholics for their silence on the NI situation and especially for their silence on the breaches of human rights there. In planning their Irish visit, they decided (a) to consult everyone who was interested in a peaceful resolution of the problems of NI and (b) to be guided by the views of the Irish bishops as to who they should see.

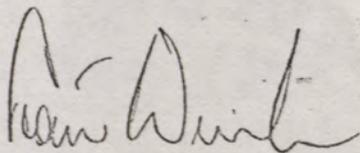
Bishop Hurley then read quickly to me the text of a letter which he proposed to send today to the leaders of all the political parties which have representatives elected to the NI Assembly. The letter explained the nature of the visit by the US Bishops and emphasised in particular their interest in human rights and in the US dimension to the NI situation. It went on to invite each of the political parties "which desired a peaceful solution" to nominate two representatives who would meet with the US bishops in a hotel convenient to Belfast early in the week beginning 21 October.

In reply to his invitation for comments on the text, I said that the vast majority of people of Ireland did not regard Sinn Féin as a political party in the generally accepted sense of the term. Sinn Féin supported and advocated violence as a means of achieving political objectives and it sought, through association with individuals and groups in the U.S., a legitimacy and respectability which was simply not accorded to them in Ireland. A meeting between

the US bishops and Sinn Féin would be exploited in the US by NORAIID and others who were heavily involved in killing and destruction in Ireland and Britain. If it was necessary for the US bishops to address any letter to Sinn Féin, I suggested that they use the form of words used in the study done by the Inter-Church Group on violence in Ireland which had concluded that there was no justification in Ireland today for the use of violence to achieve political objectives. It seemed reasonable to expect that the US bishops should meet only with individuals and groups who subscribed to that point of view.

In reply Bishop Hurley said that they had consulted with the ten bishops of the northern Irish province on the evening of 8 October in Maynooth and one of the points which had arisen in the course of that meeting was the possible invitation to Sinn Féin. The northern bishops had said that while they themselves would not meet Sinn Féin, they felt that the visiting US bishops should do so. Bishop Hurley said he had also consulted the US Embassy in Dublin (Mr. Jack Boyle, Chargé d'Affaires) and that they saw "some advantages" in meeting Sinn Féin but had pointed out that the Irish Government did not do so themselves. I confirmed the position of the Government and asked Bishop Hurley again if he would consider re-drafting the letter to Sinn Féin or alternatively consider not writing to that party at all. Bishop Hurley said that he would note my request, discuss it with Cardinal Ó Fiaich and send me a copy of the letter as issued in due course.

When speaking to Mr. Boyle of the US Embassy on another matter later, I raised with him the question of the views he had expressed to Bishop Hurley. He explained that he had told the Bishop that it was obvious that no solution to the NI problem would stick unless it received the support of the people who supported Sinn Féin. In that sense, Sinn Féin were relevant to the problem and from an academic political science position, there was some advantage in talking to their representatives. He had been careful to point out that the Irish Government did not meet with Sinn Féin and even refused to receive delegations including Sinn Féin members.



Séan Donlon  
Secretary  
11 October 1984

cc. Minister  
Taoiseach  
Tánaiste  
Ambassador, Washington  
A/Sec Lillis