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Meeting with Bishop Cathal Daly, Belfast,
13 November, 1986

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I called on Bishop Cathal Daly at his residence in Belfast on 13 November.

The main points which we covered were the following:

West Belfast

The Bishop was very critical of the oppressive security presence at two recent funerals in West Belfast (the McKernan and Murphy funerals). He entirely approved of the statements issued by the local clergy in each instance (Fr. Tom Toner in Andersonstown and Fr. Jim Donaghy in Ballymurphy). In each case the Provos had respected the family's wish not to have a paramilitary funeral. The clergy had told this to the RUC Divisional Commander and had asked the security forces to keep their distance. However, this was not done.

In this general context, the Bishop drew a comparison between the RUC's attitude in Portadown on 12 July and the behaviour of the security forces at these funerals. In Portadown nationalists were asked to accept that, for political considerations rather than for strict policing reasons, the Orange parade would have to be routed up the Garvaghy Road. The same justification was no doubt used for the security forces' low profile at the Bingham funeral. In West Belfast, on the other hand, strict policing reasons clearly take precedence over any political considerations.

The Bishop was also critical about the heavy security presence which he observed at a Catholic scouts' parade on the Falls Road on Sunday, 2 November. This was totally unjustifiable and he had written to the RUC to complain about it. In this regard

he referred with some bitterness to visits which RUC officers have been paying to some of his West Belfast clergy recently for advice on better community relations. "If they came to us before they did something like that, we could give them the right advice". I told the Bishop that we would pursue this matter.

North Belfast

The Bishop has heard that a "pact" between the Loyalist paramilitaries and the IRA ended the spate of assassinations in North Belfast earlier this year. This pact broke down, however, when a UDA "maverick" killed the Mullan couple (a 76-year-old woman and her son) in Ballynahinch some weeks ago. It is believed that the "maverick" in question was Billy Dickson, who was shot dead in a South Belfast bar shortly afterwards. The Bishop has heard that the Provos were extremely angry at the Mullan killing and that, in order to save the pact, the UDA agreed to settle accounts by killing Dickson. (Note: According to another regular contact, Dickson was killed because of an internal feud in the UDA involving protection money).

Murder of Constable Patterson (10 November)

Bishop Daly commented that Fitzroy Avenue was a dangerous part of Belfast for a RUC man to find himself in. Just off the Lower Ormeau Road, it has been the scene of many sectarian attacks in the past because it is close to an interface which divides the Markets area (an INLA stronghold) from a number of Loyalist areas. The Bishop was aware of speculation that there might have been a private motive for the killing. When I mentioned that the Minister had been conscious of this speculation and had deemed it prudent under the circumstances to issue no statement, the Bishop said that he agreed entirely with the Minister's approach.

Administration of Justice

The Bishop commented that the evidence of a changing attitude in relation to the supergrass trials should make it easier for the Government to go ahead with the legislation to ratify the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism.

He focussed, in particular, on the recent outcome in the Connolly case ("mini-grass" case). Owen Connolly, a former RAF man and civil servant who got involved with paramilitaries only by accident, was a witness of higher calibre than most supergrasses. Yet the judge, to his credit, felt that he could not accept Connolly's evidence and acquitted two defendants against whom there existed only Connolly's uncorroborated evidence and identification. The third of the three defendants was convicted, but on the basis of forensic evidence, not Connolly's word. It appeared that, while fundamentally trustworthy, Connolly had framed his evidence in such a way as to exculpate his wife and daughter. Inconsistencies with other accounts implicating the wife emerged and the judge rightly decided that it was unsafe to convict someone solely on the basis of Connolly's word. The Bishop was greatly encouraged by this and also by the recent acquittal in the Black and McGrady cases.

Hugh Feeney case

I briefed the Bishop on the action we have taken in the Conference framework in relation to this case. He mentioned that he has so far had only a polite acknowledgement from the Secretary of State in response to his own representations. He praised Feeney for having had the courage to stand up to the paramilitaries both inside and outside the prison. While there are a number of "black marks" against him, in particular his participation in prison protests both in England and in Northern Ireland, the Bishop believes nevertheless that an early release for Feeney would significantly undermine support for the Provos inside and outside the Maze.

I recalled the proposal conveyed by the Bishop at a recent meeting with Scott for an arrangement whereby, in exchange for giving up special category status, life-sentence prisoners in the North would be given determinate sentences. The Bishop said that Scott, who was "surrounded by his officials", had given him a rather guarded response. He had pointed out that there were many differences between the prison regime in Northern Ireland and that in England and Wales, to the latter's detriment, and that there was a danger that, if the Home Office were consulted on the Bishop's proposal (as it would have to be), unhelpful comparisons would be made both privately and in Parliament between the periods of time served for comparable offences in prisons in Northern Ireland and in Britain. The result could be a net deterioration, rather than an improvement, in the conditions for life-sentence prisoners in Northern Ireland. The Bishop replied that, while there was some force in this argument, it failed to take into account the very special circumstances of Northern Ireland.

Sinn Fein split

The Bishop saw this as the inevitable consequence of the campaign by Gerry Adams and other Northerners to win control of the movement. Reflecting on the North/South axis of the split, he saw one longer-term advantage in the development. As long as Southerners (O'Connell, O Bradaigh) were involved prominently in the movement, the Provos have been able to command loyalty in the South without too much difficulty. If, however, the Provisional movement is in future seen to consist almost exclusively of Northerners who have "turfed out" Southern dissidents, some people in the South may begin to have a change of heart. "The Northern accent, after all, grates on a lot of Southerners". There may be those who will say: let the Provos fight their own battles up there, why should we care about the North, etc. Such sentiments have been suppressed hitherto because the North/South divide in the movement was

neither apparent nor problematic. With most of the Southern leadership now "in exile", however, Adams may find it difficult to generate the same level of interest and commitment in the South in future.

For Adams, the Bishop commented, political involvement and the 'armed struggle' are merely two sides of the same coin. The latter will certainly continue - "and with a vengeance" (lest anyone think that the Provos have been weakened by the new development).

The Bishop believes that Sinn Fein will not gain a single seat in the Dail, though they will undoubtedly be a disruptive factor. He expects that they will campaign in Leitrim, in Cavan-Monaghan and in Louth. He was very critical of John Joe McGirl, whom he knows from his own days in Longford, and regretted the latter's popularity in Leitrim, where a sizeable section of the electorate continues to be susceptible to "Sinn Fein thinking".

The Fund

Bishop Daly told me that a number of his clergy in Belfast have been actively working on projects for submission to the Board of the Fund.

Fr. Matt Wallace, who has been running a successful local enterprise scheme in the Lenadoon area of West Belfast, is now doing something similar in St. Peter's parish (the Divis area). He and Fr. Sean Connolly, the new parish priest in St. Peter's, are working on a small project to create employment in the Lower Falls area. Fr. Paddy McWilliams, the parish priest in Poleglass, is also working on a community enterprise scheme. Another priest engaged in such work is Fr. Myles Kavanagh of the Flax Trust.

Ulster Clubs

Finally, the Bishop mentioned that he has heard that the RUC recently infiltrated the Ulster Clubs in Killeel and that plans for bombing activities in that area were uncovered.

David Donoghue
David Donoghue,
18 November, 1986.

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