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Meeting with Cardinal O Fiaich, 20 February, 1986

I called on Cardinal O Fiaich at his residence in Armagh on 20 February.

Among the points which he made to me were the following:

- In relation to the Agreement, his main advice to the Government is: "Just keep going - keep up the good work and don't allow the pace to be slowed down!"
- We dealt in detail with a number of recent incidents involving the security forces. Such incidents, the Cardinal warned, inevitably provoke the question, "Where is the Anglo-Irish Agreement now?" The only possible response is for the Government to pursue each case vigorously with the British Government and to do "the best it can" in relation to preventing recurrence of such incidents in the future.
- Partly because Francis Bradley's uncle is one of the Cardinal's diocesan priests, we focussed initially on the fatal shooting near Toomebridge. While the Cardinal is prepared to concede that the man may have been about to shoot at the plainclothes Army men, the circumstances suggest a "stake-out" which would make it difficult for the Army to argue that self-defence was involved. Bradley's family, he understood, were "saying nothing" about the shooting or about Francis's possible membership of the Provisional IRA. The Cardinal then recalled in some detail the Grew/Carroll killing, disputing various aspects of the RUC version of events. He recalled also the shooting of Adrian Carroll, predicting that the outcome of the present

trial of five UDR men would have an important effect on nationalist attitudes to the Agreement. In relation to the recent UDR shooting incident near Cookstown, the Cardinal welcomed the suspension of those responsible and hoped that this would become the norm for all future incidents of this kind. He noted little evidence so far (from his own travels around the North) of UDR patrols being accompanied by the RUC: "there's a big distance", he commented, between acceptance by the security forces of a principle and its actual implementation on the ground. Referring briefly to the "very bad" case recently in which the RUC reportedly beat up two young men from Camlough, he commented that, with this kind of thing continuing, and with the Stalker Report looming, he did not see how the SDLP could possibly call on nationalists to support the RUC.

- The Cardinal was impressed by Mallon's recent victory. Mallon had managed to get out a strong SDLP vote even in traditionally Republican areas such as Crossmaglen and Camlough. In such areas, of course, there had never been much difference between what the Cardinal termed the "moderate wing of Sinn Fein" (those espousing non-violence) and "the greener wing" of the SDLP. Mallon, in other words, had been "knocking on an open door" to a large extent: people wanted a nationalist MP and did not particularly care whether he was from the SDLP or Sinn Fein. The Cardinal paid tribute to Mallon's personal integrity and courage, noting that, even though he lived in an exposed position in a staunchly Orange area of Co. Armagh, he had fearlessly condemned violence from whatever source over a long number of years.

- In the Cardinal's view, the Government should put pressure on the SDLP to engage in talks aimed at a power-sharing Government.

- The Cardinal is unenthusiastic about the election of Dr. Robert Eames as Archbishop of Armagh. Eames, whom he has known for years, has a poor ecumenical record and, at the personal level, is something of a "cold fish". (At the latter level, the Cardinal indicated confidentially that he would have preferred Mehaffey). Eames was also active in Official Unionist circles during his time in Derry and "a little less so" in Belfast. However, his public pronouncements about the Agreement have been constructive and the Cardinal will keep an open mind about him. The date being talked about for Eames' enthronement is 19 April. The Cardinal recalled the DUP disruption of Armstrong's enthronement (occasioned chiefly by the presence of the ^{then} Taoiseach). He has heard that Eames' elevation provoked the private comment from Paisley that "we'll be down in Armagh to give him a warm reception".

- The Cardinal made some unflattering remarks about the present Presbyterian Moderator. He explained that, as the influence of the fundamentalist wing of the Presbyterian Church has been growing in recent years, "they have to be given a chance every couple of years" (at the Moderatorship). He is pleased that an ecumenically-minded academic, Prof. John Thompson, has been chosen as Dickinson's successor. Thompson has signed on for the forthcoming Ballymascanlon Conference - a welcome change from his predecessor's abstention. He should make life easier, furthermore, for the 24 Ministers who dissented from Dickinson's line on the Agreement. The Cardinal understands that the latter held a meeting recently which attracted an attendance of 60 (though this merely means that 60 Presbyterian Ministers are open to discussion of the Church's position, not necessarily that the group of 24 has grown larger).

- The Cardinal dwelled at some length on the fact that, despite one abortive attempt on his part, he and Paisley

have never met. He was about to be introduced to the DUP leader at a reception in Belfast in 1979 when the latter, recognising him, "turned and fled". Some years later, a casual remark in a radio interview to the effect that he would welcome dialogue with Paisley provoked a long and scurrilous letter in which the DUP leader ruled out any possibility of a private meeting but suggested a TV debate instead. The Cardinal wrote back to decline the offer. There has been some subsequent correspondence, and mutual acquaintances such as Brum Henderson have occasionally tried to 'set up' a meeting by inviting both to a dinner party, but, to the Cardinal's regret, no contact has as yet taken place.

- In strict confidence, the Cardinal told me of a meeting he had recently with Gusty Spence. Spence divides his time now between social work and a fringe political party in the Shankill Road area called the "Progressive Unionist Party". The Cardinal corresponded with Spence while the latter was in prison (where, thanks to his contacts with Republican prisoners, he had developed an interest in Irish language and history). At their recent meeting, Spence told the Cardinal that he was determined to spend the rest of his life trying to discourage young people from getting involved with paramilitary groups. In relation to the Agreement, he said that his attitude was one of opposition but that this was grounded less on what the Agreement actually contained than on the fact that it had been negotiated in conditions of secrecy. He objected to "some crowd over there in London determining our fate and not consulting us". He did concede, however, that in many ways "Paisley and Robinson have brought this on themselves".
- Finally, the Cardinal asked me to thank the Minister for his recent reply to him on the subject of the Maze hunger strikers' relatives. He fully agreed with the policy of receiving immediate relatives only and as individuals,

rather than as representatives of a committee. He commented that the ending of the Maze hunger strike, "widely attributed to Peter Barry", had done the Agreement a lot of good but that action in relation to the supergrass system was urgently needed if a recurrence of it were to be averted.

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24 February 1986

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