



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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FUNERALS

A meeting took place in the Secretariat on 15 April to discuss the handling of funerals by the RUC. The British side said that they had no remit from the Secretary of State to discuss the matter, given that it was an operational one for the RUC, but they had come to listen to our views. In fact, there was a lengthy and useful discussion.

We pointed out that in the Marley case, assurances had been given by the Church that there would be no paramilitary display in the Church grounds or its precincts (i.e., beret and gloves, firing of volleys) but that the RUC had not been satisfied with these assurances. There followed considerable discussion on the question of what could or should satisfy the RUC. We stressed that it was unrealistic to expect 100% certainty that assurances would be carried through. The British side stressed the strength of reaction in the RUC to the firing of paramilitary volleys, especially after a series of fatalities on their side such as had occurred recently. They pressed the idea that the SDLP and local community leaders should join with the Church in establishing general principles for paramilitary funerals. We referred to the particular sensitivity about funerals in the Irish Catholic tradition and cautioned that assurances were very much a matter for the families and the Church which might resent interference by the SDLP or by community leaders. We said it would not be realistic to expect mediation by the SDLP in particular funerals, but that it might be possible for the SDLP and community leaders to join in supporting general principles which might be agreed between the Church and the RUC. The British side were interested by this possibility. They accepted that the issue involved not only the political aspect of Provo manipulation of funerals, but also the balance to be maintained by the RUC between preserving the peace and attempting to ensure no breach of law.

It appears that the British side hope to use the Chief Constable's offer to heed criticisms and take account of views in order to establish general principles which would have general support in the nationalist community and would have a carrot-and-stick effect, i.e., that the police would take a "calculated risk" in accepting assurances on the understanding that if they were broken the blame would be placed squarely on the Provos by the nationalist community and that the police would not be expected to accept assurances in all cases in the future.

In respect of this, we made the point first that there was generally no problem about funerals where the family expressed a clear wish for no paramilitary trappings. Second, there were funerals on which the Church could assure the police with reasonable certainty that there would be no paramilitary trappings in the Church or precincts. We said we felt that it was reasonable to accept such assurances. Third, there were funerals such as the Marley and Logue funerals where because of the importance of the individual in the organisation and/or other circumstances, it was less reasonable to expect the RUC to accept assurances. We said it was important to emphasise that such cases were relatively rare and should not dominate a policy. The British indicated that if actions such as the firing of volleys in honour of Marley at the Ardoyne ~~funeral~~ *memorial* would satisfy the Provos, that could be a way forward in the most difficult cases.

Declan O'Donovan,  
16 April 1987.

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