



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2017/10/47
Creation Dates:	12 February 1987
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Teirfo:)
Telephone:) 101 780822

Telex 2 000

Tagairt)
Reference)



Funerals

AN ROINN GNÓTHAI EACHTRACHA
Department of Foreign Affairs

BAILE ATHA CLIATH, 2.
Dublin 2.

12 February, 1987.

See page 2

Mr. Daithi O'Ceallaigh,
Belfast.

Dear Daithi,

You may have noted from David Donoghue's report of 6 February on a recent conversation with Bishop Cathal Daly that the Bishop was critical of the RUC for failing to heed the advice of his clergy in West Belfast in relation to recent funerals there.

The funerals to which the Bishop was referring were the funeral of James McKernon on 16 September 1986 and the funeral of James Murphy on 24 October 1986. He was, however, also unhappy with the high profile of the security forces at the funeral of Thomas Power and John O'Reilly in the Markets area on 24 January 1987.

In the McKernon case, as you will recall, there was a very heavy police presence despite the fact that the McKernon family had given assurances beforehand that there would be no paramilitary trappings (assurances which were honoured) and that the local clergy had conveyed these assurances to the police. On the same day, the funeral of the murdered UVF man, John Bingham, took place in another part of the city and, though unmistakably a paramilitary event, was marked by a considerably more distant security presence. This contrast, naturally enough, aroused anger in the nationalist community. You will have noted also the comparison drawn by Bishop Daly with the Garvaghy Road decision last summer.

In the case of the James Murphy funeral, which also took place in West Belfast, the police were again present in very large numbers and in close proximity to the mourners, despite the fact that assurances had again been given by the dead man's family beforehand that there would be no paramilitary involvement, that the local clergy had conveyed these assurances to the police and that these assurances had also been honoured.

More recently, the heavy security presence at the Power/O'Reilly funeral on 24 January 1987 caused further discontent. The police held that a number of men attempted to form a colour party on that occasion. This may well have been the case but the saturation of the Markets area by the UDR on the night before the funeral and the presence of both police and UDR in large numbers at the funeral itself inevitably caused resentment and recalled the behaviour of the security forces at the McKernon and Murphy funerals.

Our side of the Secretariat has, of course, been active in connection with all three funerals and has conveyed the Government's concern at the likely consequences of insensitive behaviour on the part of the security forces detailed to cover them. Nevertheless, with the memory of the Power/O'Reilly funeral still fresh, it might be worth making these points to the British side again. Where a funeral is announced beforehand by the deceased's family and the local clergy as a strictly non-paramilitary event, the presence of the security forces at it in large numbers and in close proximity to the mourners seems difficult to justify. It is inevitable that such a policy will foster a sense of grievance and injustice on the part of those attending the funeral which will be exploited by paramilitary organisations for recruitment purposes. This is the deeply-held view of responsible nationalist leaders such as Bishop Cathal Daly.

What might also be conveyed, however, is the frustration felt by Bishop Daly and his clergy at the indications that the advice which they give to the security forces in relation to matters of this kind is falling on deaf ears. We have been encouraging the clergy for some time past, particularly in areas such as West Belfast, to approach the police directly in order to discuss security problems which have arisen or are likely to arise. According to Bishop Daly, however, there is a feeling on the part of his clergy (and also on his own part) that such dialogue is meaningless unless the police act on the advice given by the clergy, particularly in relation to sensitive matters such as funerals. Negative experiences of this kind make the clergy more sceptical whenever the RUC take the initiative themselves and seek their advice on better community relations. It will be recalled that the clergy associated with both the McKernon and Murphy funerals found it necessary to issue statements criticising the security forces for the manner in which they behaved before, during and after the respective funerals. These statements were issued with the express approval of Bishop Daly. It would be a shame if the goodwill which the RUC has acquired in the eyes of many nationalists as a result of the largely even-handed performance over the past year were to be jeopardised in this fashion. In the context of our joint efforts under the Agreement to improve relations between the security forces and the nationalist community, these points might, perhaps be made to the other side.

Yours sincerely,

Charles O'Donnell

P.S. Much the same could be said of the McFlinchey funeral, but we have confined ourselves to the Belfast funerals of which we have better reports. In making these points we recognise nonetheless the security presence at the McFlinchey funeral.