

E.R.

Mr Middleton

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BELFAST

DATE: 30.1.76

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Mr England

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Mr Janes (Mufax)

Mr Cradock

Mr Leahy

Mr Gilliland

Q: 1/5/76

VM: I have discussed with Mr Leahy & Mr Wyatt - we all think that all we can do is to say to you "Noted". But thanks all the same! 8.30.1.76

FRANK STAGG

1. Bishop Daly telephoned at about 9.30 pm on 29 January. He asked me to explain to the Secretary of State that he (the Bishop) had felt obliged to issue a public statement that evening appealing to the Home Secretary to accede to Stagg's wishes, and to save his life.

2. The Bishop recalled that he had kept in touch with us during Stagg's hunger strike and that he had hitherto accepted my arguments that there was no case for transferring Stagg to Northern Ireland, and had tended to agree with me that Stagg was being encouraged to continue his hunger strike for political reasons. The Bishop had, however, changed his mind and he wanted the Secretary of State to know why.

3. Over the past 3 days the Bishop had been visiting many of his parishes and had been talking both to Catholics and Protestants. He found a majority of people deeply worried about the effects of the Stagg hunger strike. Few people supported Stagg but large numbers were afraid that Provisional violence following Stagg's death would create chaos and provoke retaliation. From both sides of the community Bishop Daly had been urged to intervene.

4. After "prayerful" consideration the Bishop had concluded that it would be to the advantage of the Provisionals for Stagg to die. He hoped the Secretary of State would take this into account in any discussions he had with the Home Secretary and would urge the Home Secretary to offer to move Stagg so as to get him off his strike.

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5. The Bishop said that up to a week ago the Provisionals in Londonderry, conscious of declining support, had planned no demonstrations to mark the anniversary of Bloody Sunday. The Bishop had hoped that for the first time since that event the day would pass quietly. Now, however, the Provisionals had been able to work up support jointly for Stagg and for Bloody Sunday and demonstrations would be taking place. The Bishop felt this to be an enormous tragedy.

6. Bishop Daly spoke with unusual emotion. He was clearly embarrassed in trying to explain his change of stance.

*D.K. Middleton*  
D K Middleton

30 January 1976