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Visit to Northern Ireland, 31 August-1 September 1983

I accompanied Mr T. O'Sullivan, Ambassador to the United States, on a visit to Northern Ireland on 31 August and 1 September. The following are some of the main points made by those we met.

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich

He was aware of the contacts with the Department and was grateful for the efforts being made in connection with the current prosecution in the Philippines of a Columban priest, Fr O'Brien, for complicity in murder. He intended to write to Bishop Fortrich of the Philippines in order to indicate the interest of the Irish Catholic Church in the trial.

He said he shared Fr Denis Faul's concern about the Provisional take-over of the Relatives for Justice Committee's campaign against the use of so-called supergrass. He shared the view that Provisional Sinn Féin are looking for a platform from which to launch their campaign for a seat in the European Parliament. He thought Adams would be their candidate though he doesn't think he will win a seat. Personally he thinks the use of informers, for that is what the supergrasses are, is obnoxious and reminiscent of practices used by the British in times gone by. I formed the impression that the Cardinal had not himself given much thought to the issue and was being guided in the matter by Fr Faul.

The Cardinal spent some time justifying his statement at the funeral of Martin Malone on 1 August. Malone had been shot dead by a UDR patrol on the previous Saturday evening, apparently after some mild banter between the patrol and the people accompanying Malone. Cardinal Ó Fiaich said he had phrased his statement carefully so as not to be accused of interference should a person be charged with the killing. He said that if he is expected to condemn murders "by our own people", and indeed he is applauded when he does so, then he has every right and duty to issue the same condemnation when it is the Army which carries out the murders. [Fr Denis Faul told me later that he believed Fr Raymond Murray had drafted the Cardinal's statement.]

The Cardinal said that the outgoing British Army Commander-in-Chief, called Chigwell, had paid a farewell call on him recently. The

Cardinal thought he was a fairly decent man and was therefore astounded to hear him defend the Army for the shooting of Martin Malone. Apparently a very lively conversation ensued in which it became clear that Chigwell supported the Union and defended the Army killings on Bloody Sunday in Derry while the Cardinal defended the rights of those he felt had been injured by the Army.

Cardinal Ó Fiaich also mentioned that a joint visit to the United States by himself and Bishop Armstrong of Armagh was being talked about, something on the lines of the recent joint visit of the Lord Mayors of Dublin and Belfast. The Cardinal was clearly hesitant about participating in such a visit and feared that the British would try to take it over for their own purposes. Were the Presbyterian and Methodist leaders to join it he thought it would be easier for the British to exercise control. The Cardinal also gave the impression that if he did go there might be unfavourable reactions within his own community and within conservative Catholic elements in the United States. Bishop Eames, whom we met later, also referred to a joint Church visit to the US (including Presbyterians and Methodists). He thought it might be best if it took place at a level other than the highest.

Presbyterians

We met the Moderator, Dr Tom Simpson, the Joint Convenor of the Government Committee, Mr Allen, and the Clerk of the General Assembly, Dr Weir. They gave the usual reasons why as a Church they feel they cannot make a submission to the New Ireland Forum and how they see it as an alternative to the Northern Ireland Assembly, in which they would wish to see the SDLP participate.

Mr Allen raised the recent interview given to RTE in which Ken Livingstone referring to 800 years of British rule in Ireland and compared it with Nazi Germany. Mr Allen thought it would have been well received among Presbyterians had the Government or the Catholic Church condemned Mr Livingstone.

They said that when the Friends of Ireland next visit Ireland they should try to visit Northern Ireland and see people of both traditions. The Friends, and indeed most American politicians, are seen in the North as being friends of only one tradition. It would be of distinct advantage if they could show themselves to be friends

of both traditions and if they could indicate, as both the Government and the New Ireland Forum have done, that they are conscious of the preoccupations of Northern Protestants. The Ambassador undertook to look into this.

The Ambassador briefed them on the situation in the United States. They expressed particular appreciation of the reaction by the Irish and American Governments to the St Patrick's Day parade in New York of which Michael Flannery was appointed Grand Marshall. They pointed out that the General Assembly of the Church, meeting in Dublin in June, had welcomed the "more positive tone" of the statement issued by President Reagan on St Patrick's Day and were encouraged by the Government's boycott of the parade, which gave the lead to US political leaders and to Cardinal Cooke.

Finally Mr Allen asked if there had been any response to their offer to arrange a trip for members of the New Ireland Forum. I told Mr Allen that I understood that the matter was under consideration and that I expected that the Forum would make contact with him shortly.

SDLP

Dr Joe Hendron, Dr Alistair McDonnell and Mr Brian Feeney, whom we met in Belfast, were very depressed and gloomy about the future. Clearly the Provisional Sinn Féin success in the Westminster election lies heavily with them and with the exception of the possible effects of the New Ireland Forum they had little to say about how to put Provisional Sinn Féin on the defensive.

Dr McDonnell said the Forum is the last chance for constitutional nationalism in Northern Ireland. A failure to produce ideas with which dialogue can be opened with the British and the Unionists would have a very demoralising effect in Northern Ireland and would add to the existing alienation from the political process within the nationalist community. It would in particular have a detrimental effect on SDLP members like himself who would be faced with the stark choice of continuing on the constitutional path or joining forces with Provisional Sinn Féin.

Dr Hendron also concentrated on the need for the Forum to produce a realistic report which could be presented to the Americans as well as to the British and the Unionists. He thought that a responsibility would fall on the shoulders of the Embassy in Washington to ensure that the United States would look favourably on such a realistic report. The Ambassador assured Dr Hendron that the Embassy would fulfil its obligations in this regard and would certainly set about getting support with some chance of success from the Friends of Ireland in particular. He added that US policy as a whole could not be expected to back any proposals which did not also have the support of the British Government. Where the support of the Embassy could have a very valuable effect would be a situation where the British accepted proposals put forward by us but the Unionists remained intransigent.

Mr Feeney was extremely worried about the British whom he thought were leaning increasingly towards the Unionists. In particular he felt that the process of "creeping integration" is continuing. One recent example is that the regulations governing the training of doctors as general practitioners have been changed with the result that fewer doctors trained in the State are finding jobs as GPs. He thought the influence of Powell at Westminster is increasing and is of a baleful kind. The appointment of Molyneaux as a Privy Counsellor he took as proof that the OUP star is in the ascendant. He also said that at recent briefing sessions with British diplomats bound for the United States they had clearly left him with the impression that they thought they had the security situation under control, that they wished to continue with the Northern Ireland Assembly and that they saw no solid reason for any fundamental changes. [I had the strong impression from the newly appointed British Consul in Boston, whom I met recently in Dublin, that he thought that British purpose was essentially to try and hold firm on present policy.] In passing he mentioned two particular examples where the British had clearly leaned towards the OUP. The first was the permission granted by the RUC to the Orange Order and to the Black Preceptory (of which Molyneaux is the leader) to hold marches in Downpatrick in the last eighteen months. Eddie McGrady is convinced that this helped him lose the seat by giving votes to Provisional Sinn Féin. Mr Feeney also thought that the recent

reduction by Mr Prior of spending on housing - £35 million - with an equivalent increase in spending on security was in effect taking that sum from Catholics, who are very well represented in the building trade, and giving it to Protestants, who form the vast majority of those employed in the security forces.

Bishop Eames

Like the Presbyterians, Bishop Eames expressed very positive views about the Government's reaction to the appointment of Michael Flannery as Grand Marshall of the New York St Patrick's Day parade. He said that in Northern Ireland there had been a spontaneous favourable reaction to the policy from both Presbyterians and Church of Ireland members, and that our views had had a good and deep influence there.

Bishop Eames shares the view that the growing unemployment in Northern Ireland is likely to cause major problems, particularly in regard to the majority community. Up until now most Protestants had jobs and those who lost them in recent years are only now beginning to feel the effects as the redundancy money has cushioned the reality until now. He felt that unemployment is having a radical effect on politics which will increase as the reality of unemployment becomes apparent. The impression left by the Bishop was that the alienation within the minority community might well now be matched by alienation within the Protestant community. It remains to be seen whether this means a swing away from the Official Unionists to the DUP or whether it means a move from both towards those elements which are closest to the loyalist paramilitaries.

Bishop Eames raised the possible US order for Short Brothers Ltd. He said, in confidence, that he had been in contact with Sir Philip Foreman, the Shorts Director, concerning the possibility of a joint Church declaration by himself and Bishop Cahal Daly with local Presbyterian and Methodist representatives, aimed at the United States, supporting the Shorts bid for American orders on the grounds that the management and the trade unions had reached agreement on future employment policies. (Unlike the Presbyterians we had met, Bishop Eames accepted that discrimination

had existed in Shorts and that it was and is not easy for a Catholic to work in East Belfast.) He is doubtful if a statement will see the light of day and fully recognises that in this matter Bishop Daly would be on a knife-edge with his community. As an indication of the nature of the problems, Sir Philip Foreman had told him that of 583 applications received recently for apprentices no more than about a dozen were from Catholics. In response to a question from the Bishop about the prospects for the US order the Ambassador said that he had no evidence as to whether Shorts would get it but if they did not it would not be because of the campaign waged by Fr Seán McManus and the Irish National Caucus.

Bishop Eames said that if President Reagan visits Ireland a large cross section of opinion in Northern Ireland could usefully be invited to meet him. He thought that persons who would not always welcome an invitation from the Government would be hesitant about refusing such an invitation. He said that as the Pope had visited the border area with beneficial results so could President Reagan. Such a visit could have great symbolic importance, especially if a major address were given, for example, on the site of the Battle of the Boyne.

Alliance Party

Oliver Napier and John Cushnahan joined us for lunch on the second day. They were both very depressed at the situation and said that the SDLP must bear a large share of the responsibility for the present difficulties by their conduct during and since the hunger strike. The proper area for their activities is within Northern Ireland. They are instead involved in the Forum and are not sufficiently involved in constituency work which is where the Provisionals have the edge on them. They were also very critical of the Unionists whom they characterised as having learned nothing. They see no desire among the OUP for compromise and on the DUP side see Robinson as being much more dangerous than Paisley. They did not know why Molyneux had been appointed a Privy Counsellor.

Mr Napier said that politics in Northern Ireland must now be seen as ante- and post-hunger strike. That is the watershed. Both he

and Mr Cushnahan were surprisingly critical of Mrs Thatcher's handling of the hunger strike. They agree with her principles but not with the insensitivity with which she pursued her ends. Mr Cushnahan said that the decisive change in the attitude of the minority community took place after the insensitive way in which Cardinal Ó Fiaich and Bishop Edward Daly were treated by her. Mr Napier in an aside said he was personally opposed to the use of supergrasses.

They confirmed that the Provisionals now control West Belfast. The main reason for the support for the Provisionals, in their view, is that they are seen to be able to deliver to their constituents. They thought that had Joe Hendron stood aside Gerry Fitt might have retained the seat. They do not think that Joe Hendron, given his middle-class background and early upbringing outside West Belfast, could have won it. They expressed the view, which we have heard elsewhere, that Mr Hendron is unlikely to remain active in politics and to fight the seat in the next general election. [Dr Hendron has not at any stage himself referred to these rumours in conversation with officers of the Department.] They are convinced that the Provisionals are continuing to increase their support and that they have not peaked.

They said that in their view the New Ireland Forum is irrelevant. "Guff" was how John Cushnahan referred to it. It was a great mistake to set it up and did a great disservice to the SDLP in that it provided them with an excuse to avoid getting involved in politics within Northern Ireland. They repeated their well-known view that the Forum was created to let the SDLP off the hook. They also repeated that they did not wish to make any submission to the Forum.

They also confirmed much of what Bishop Eames had to say about the effects of unemployment beginning to be felt by Protestants now that redundancy monies have been spent. The support for the Alliance Party, in such circumstances where polarisation is increasing, is likely to diminish. They also saw a danger that loyalist paramilitary activity might increase. They claim that the UDA and UVF etc. have been quiet because their constitutional position has been secure. Should that be in any way threatened there could be a massive loyalist paramilitary backlash, particularly if there is large-scale unemployment.

They spoke highly about the proposed all-party trip to the United States to encourage investment, which they support. They feel it will do good and do not see Paisley's presence as doing damage to the purposes of the visit.

D. Ó Ceallaigh

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