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Northern Nationalist Response to the Anglo-Irish Summit

During the course of a visit to Northern Ireland yesterday I spoke at length to Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick, owner and editor of the Irish News, Fr. Denis Faul, Mr. P. J. McGrory and Mr. Jim Dougall (RTE), as well as to a number of other nationalists, for the purpose of ascertaining their reaction to the Anglo-Irish Summit of 19 November last.

They all emphasised that Bishop Cahal Daly, in his speech and subsequent interviews last weekend, caught the mood in the nationalist community, particularly in the middle class sections of that community. The heart of that mood is a deep sense of anger at Mrs. Thatcher, who is seen as having dismissed out of hand the Forum Report, their aspiration (however mild) to a united Ireland and their deep sense of alienation from the State and from the majority community. It is not that their expectations had been too high - Fr. Faul said his people (meaning the Catholic poor) never had any expectations - but that the very essence of their position had been denied by the British Government. Their anger is not directed at the Irish Government and they feel that the Government should continue the talks until the next Summit. If the British at that stage show themselves incapable of responding to the nationalist predicament then the talks should be abandoned publicly.

Fitzpatrick said there is a mood of despondency in the nationalist community. Many nationalists feel that the Taoiseach took it lying down. He understands that because the Government wishes to continue the dialogue with the British the Taoiseach had to avoid an open confrontation with Mrs. Thatcher. That subtle point is however lost on many

nationalists. Some of his own Board are SDLP members and when the Board met yesterday they raised doubts about his editorial policy. He will continue to support the Government in his editorial comments. He agreed that some progress has been made in the summit and he believes that the Government should try to tease out what the British mean by their references in the Communique to the two identities and in the Press Conference to the need for a new political framework and new security structures. He believes that Thatcher has now engaged herself in the problem of Northern Ireland in a new way and that it would be difficult for her to repudiate those positive elements. If at the next summit the British response is perceived to be inadequate then the Government should come out strongly anti-British. He was very critical of Hurd and said that if the sentiments he expressed last Wednesday represent British Government policy then there is no hope. Fitzpatrick said that power-sharing on its own would now be totally inadequate. The bottom line is a role for the Irish Government. The SDLP could not accept anything less. He was very critical of John Hume, whom he thought sat on the fence and did not give the Government the support it deserved. It is the duty of Northern nationalists to support the Irish Government of the day, unless that Government goes completely off the rails.

Fr. Faul said that the ordinary Catholics were not deeply affected by the outcome of the summit. Bishop Cahal Daly's views were correct in so far as the middle class were concerned. Ordinary Catholics had no great trust in the New Ireland Forum and therefore their expectations were low.

Fr. Faul considers therefore that the damage from the Summit is limited. Nationalists, particularly the middle class, are upset at the gloating of the unionists about the outcome of the Summit. Provisional Sinn Fein are very happy. Adams, wisely from his point of view, has said nothing in public other than the initial short statement. It is the Provisionals, both Sinn Fein and the IRA who are the main beneficiaries.

The Government should stay on its course and continue the dialogue with the British until the next summit. They must be seen to deliver both at the next summit and between now and then, especially on areas such as the prisons. He would like to see a large number, perhaps 50, prisoners released between now and Christmas, concentrating on those who were minors when sentenced and are now held at the pleasure of the Secretary of State. He would also like to see a strong statement from the Minister for Foreign Affairs about the sectarian assassinations. Three Catholics have been killed in recent weeks bringing the total number of Catholics killed by loyalist assassins to 403. The IRA at the moment are holding back their gunmen from taking retribution. Fr. Faul feels it is the duty of the Government and of people like himself to speak out strongly so as to prevent IRA retribution. If policing in Northern Ireland is normal why are they not giving protection to Catholics who are being assassinated by loyalists? Why is it that when a Catholic was assassinated last week in Belfast it was nationalist and not loyalist areas that were searched.

Mr. P. J. McGrory said he was shocked by the press conferences, particularly by Mrs. Thatcher's blunt dismissal of the New Ireland Forum. Most of the Catholic solicitors he has met since were equally shocked. They cannot understand why Thatcher was so dismissive and so blunt. Equally they were shocked by Hurd's references to normal policing. The mood in the middle classes in the minority community is one of great despondency and despair. The unionists are clearly triumphalist and are gloating over their victory. Many of his acquaintances in the Law Society could barely restrain their sense of satisfaction when talking to him and his judgement would be that it was only with great restraint that loyalists have avoided marching on the streets in triumph. The overall feeling in the nationalist community is that Mrs. Thatcher has rejected all of the Forum Report as well as the concept and substance of alienation.

McGrory said that John Hume's position has been damaged. A major gesture was required and he had suggested such a gesture to a member of the SDLP Executive. He has said that the SDLP Assembly members should go to the Assembly, that Hume should make a major speech indicating why he and his party cannot participate in that Assembly and that they should then resign en bloc. Instead Hume had waited on the side-lines for a week to see what way things would develop and had then made a statement to the Dublin press. The only constitutional nationalist who has made the right gesture and who has struck a chord among nationalists is Bishop Cahal Daly.

Provisional Sinn Fein have very wisely from their point of view kept quiet about the whole affair. They cannot be seen to be gloating over any nationalist defeat at the hands of the British. Privately they are very satisfied with the outcome of the summit and they realise that it has given them a major advantage. He would not think that they will necessarily hold this advantage, given the ability of the IRA to throw away their advantage through atrocities, nor does he think it will necessarily transfer into more votes at the local government elections as 6/7 months is a long time in politics.

Jim Dougall believes that Hume is losing support in Northern Ireland and that his statement at the weekend was designed to recover some of the ground which is being lost. Bishop Daly's speech and interviews accurately reflected the mood in the nationalist community. It is one of anger at Thatcher and is not yet directed against the Irish Government. Bishop Daly's intervention, as well as the speech by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Hume's statement, have helped to steady the nationalists. He believes that the Government must keep on its present course with the British. Nationalists will allow the Government one more chance. The support built up for the Government among Northern nationalists by the Minister for Foreign Affairs has not yet been lost. If the Government takes another bad summit lying down it will be lost.

While his friends and acquaintances do not agree with the bombing in Brighton they are now more understanding of those who planted those bombs. He has no doubt but that the British Government is driving people into the hands of Provisional Sinn Fein. Two dentists and one doctor acquaintance with their wives told him last Saturday night over dinner that they intend to vote Sinn Fein at the local government elections. They do not support violence but they want to indicate to Mrs. Thatcher that she cannot repudiate nationalism and get away with it. Another acquaintance who owns a number of pubs and clubs in Belfast, is greatly relieved at the summit. He normally has to put up with 3 or 4 robberies before Christmas which are carried out by the Provisionals. One well-known Provisional told him that Mrs. Thatcher had "taken the heat off them", he added that they were relieved by the summit, that Mrs. Thatcher had done their work for them and that they will not now find it necessary to look for the sort of funding they have looked for in recent years. The implications that his premises would be safe wasn't lost on him. Dougall said that the atmosphere at the OUP conference last week was triumphalist and he was particularly struck by the support for the resolution which stated that there were too many Catholics in the BBC and at the support evident for Mr. Ward who read out a list of persons working for the BBC and believed to be Catholics. Dougall also said that he received a call from David Gilliland, Press Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, following Mr. Hurd's press statement and press interviews last Wednesday. Gilliland stressed that Hurd was speaking on behalf of Mrs. Thatcher. Dougall said it was very unusual to get such a call and he is somewhat intrigued by it.

My overall assessment is that there is a very deep anger within the nationalist community at Mrs. Thatcher. That anger is not directed at the Irish Government. Those who have heretofore supported the Government in its handling of Anglo-Irish relations consider that the Government should continue the dialogue, but that if by the next summit there is no adequate response from the British to deal with alienation then the

Government should break publicly with the British. The beneficiaries of the summit are seen as Provisional Sinn Fein and Provisional IRA on the one hand and the unionists on the other. Hume and the SDLP have been damaged though not necessarily from the same quarter both for their lack of support for the Government and for what is seen as an inadequate response. There are some who believe that some gains were made at the summit but I doubt if there are many. There is little expectation that the British will respond adequately to the New Ireland Forum.

Duc

D. O Ceallaigh
27 November, 1984

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Attached is transcript of Dr. Daly's Interview on R.T.E.
on 25 November, 1984.