

E. R.

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P103/85

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Note for the Record

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH BISHOP CAHAL DALY ON 18 MAY

The Secretary of State met Bishop Cahal Daly and his assistant, Fr O'Donnell, on Monday 18 May. A number of topics were covered, as follows.

2. On security, the Bishop joined with the Secretary of State in condemning the futility of violence. The Bishop, turning to handling of paramilitary funerals, welcomed the statement of policy by the Chief Constable and expressed the hope that the RUC would adhere to this, as it was precisely the sort of development which appealed at the psychological level to the nationalist community. Indeed there was scope for more developments of this kind: the Bishop had been disappointed to find that, when his priests approached the RUC Commanders in West Belfast, they often perceived little response. Clearly this was not unrelated to the small proportion of Roman Catholics in the RUC and of course the only way to increase their number would be to improve the force's acceptability to the nationalist community at large. Might it not be possible, as a step in the right direction, to increase the representation of nationalists on PANI? In response the Secretary of State explained the difficulties which had been encountered by the Irish Government in nominating nationalists to the Authority under the terms of the Agreement. For his part, the Bishop did not believe that priests, particularly in West Belfast, would

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feel themselves in a position to join the Authority. In the meantime however the Bishop had circulated the Chief Constable's statement of policy in relation to paramilitary funerals to all his priests so that they could play their part in operating it in conjunction with the RUC.

3. Bishop Daly sought an assessment from the Secretary of State of the reaction to the Loughgall incident. The Secretary of State gave a broad account of this incident and said that he had noted little sympathy in nationalist quarters for the line being sold by Sinn Fein. The Bishop too had perceived little support: there had been no recurrence of earlier waves of sympathy in reaction to such events, but rather a mixed reaction amongst even hard-line sympathisers and general disgust at the hypocrisy of Adams. The Bishop was concerned about the death of Mr Hughes, wondering whether it might not have been possible for the ASU to be arrested and regretting that little sympathy had been expressed to the relatives of Mr Hughes. The Secretary of State briefly discussed the circumstances of Mr Hughes' death in as far as they were known and pointed to his expression of sympathy in the House on 14 May. The Bishop hoped that it would be possible for the Government to release as many details as possible about the incident and in particular the offensive nature of PIRA's operation against the RUC station. The Secretary of State undertook to examine this suggestion but pointed to the difficulties of publicising material as this might be held to be prejudicial to the DPP's examination of the dossier in the normal manner. (Mr Stephens is to discuss this with the Secretary of State tonight.)

4. The Bishop then turned to nationalist attitudes in West Belfast and measures which the Government might take there. There was a growing weariness and disenchantment with violence. Schools were now more stable than previously and had a stabilising influence. Economic progress in terms of employment and also towards equality of employment was now very important. The Bishop then made a number of suggestions for West Belfast, which I am pursuing by means of a separate minute, as follows:

- a co-ordinated job-promotions drive in West Belfast and a parallel loyalist area;
- environmental rehabilitation to raise both morale and social attitudes;
- the establishment of a further education college;
- greater clarity about the timing of the demolition of Divis Flats; and
- encouragement of positive elements from within the Irish language movement by means of increasing the number of Irish language teachers.

5. Discussion then turned to Sinn Fein's political stance. The Bishop had heard rumours, emanating from Adams, that, were HMG to declare that it had no strategic or other overwhelming interest in remaining in Northern Ireland and if such a declaration were to be agreed in broad terms with Sinn Fein, then its leaders would approach the PIRA leadership with the recommendation for a cessation of violence while political accommodations were made. He was deeply sceptical about the sincerity of any such approach: the ballot box was merely the handmaiden of political violence for PIRA and violence would always retain primacy. The only way to throttle that violence was by means of withdrawal of community support for it: until some three months ago the prospects of progress down this path were looking quite good but these had been dented recently. On the other hand recent rioting in West Belfast had been counter-productive for Sinn Fein and the Bishop expressed the hope that post-Loughgall attitudes might become more constructive once again.

6. These considerations had of course a bearing on Adams' prospect of maintaining his seat in West Belfast. The SDLP were undoubtedly making a better effort and certainly the Church-going public would support them. But the seat remained wide open.

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7. The meeting ended with agreement to remain in contact as opportunity allowed.

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D J WATKINS
Private Secretary

12 May 1987

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