



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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SECRET



Discussion with Bishop Cahal Daly,
Belfast, 26th July, 1990

1. I had an hour and a half's discussion in Belfast on Thursday evening with Bishop Cahal Daly. Our discussion centred on the present prospects for political talks, though other issues (see below) also came up. I had felt it important to see and brief the Bishop in the light of the interpretation by some commentators of his recent criticism of political leaders for setting pre-conditions to talks.

Political Talks

2. Bishop Daly began by saying he was extremely angry about the coverage of his remarks by RTE and the juxtaposition of these remarks alongside comments by Prionsias de Rossa and Peter Robinson, which left open the interpretation that he was being critical of Dublin and the SDLP. He was also unhappy with the reporting of this issue by Carol Coulter in the Irish Times. There was no question of his remarks being directed at the Irish Government or the SDLP and it was mischievous of RTE to signal that this might have been the case.
3. He went on to say that, far from being critical of the Government and the SDLP, he was quite sceptical of the seriousness of purpose of the Unionists. He did not believe that either Molyneux or Paisley had the courage or the commitment to address fundamentally the question of their relationship with nationalists on this island. Paisley was an enigma - essentially a "raving demagogue" and yet, to the Bishop's great surprise, a man who had the grace to telephone the nuns at Middleton and, in generous terms, to convey his sympathy at the death of Sr. Catherine Dunne.

4. Molyneaux was an equally unattractive figure and had shown no signs of being willing to get to grips with the problems of the North. He seemed if anything to be interested in turning the Brooke initiative away from its present thrust and towards an integrationalist objective.
5. In more general terms, the Bishop expressed himself as being strongly supportive of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. At some stage, we would have to move on to new relationships and the sooner this could be achieved the better; at the same time, there had, as he said, to be a question mark about the seriousness of purpose of the Unionist leadership and, secondly, one had to be aware that, while the nationalist community might have expected more from the Agreement, they would need very considerable reassurance before they would be happy to see it replaced.
6. I took the Bishop through the past months of negotiations and the thinking behind the Government's approach to the developing situation. He was not only very appreciative but also unexpectedly strong and forceful in his support for our stand. He also showed a surprising lack of contact with the NIO - he does not know Brooke though he admires him, had never heard of Blelloch and, while he had known of Burns, had never met him. His only NIO contact seems to be McConnell (a Catholic) but he considers him to be a "clown" - if he carries weight, he said, this reflects badly on the NIO.

Chaplains' Initiative

7. Other issues mentioned by the Bishop included the efforts of the Catholic and Church of Ireland Chaplains in the Maze to move the paramilitaries away from violence. This initiative started with talks between the IRA and the UVF in the Maze but has since moved on (as reported by Mr. McMahon)


to meetings between the Chaplains and, initially, Sinn Féin and, more recently, a group which included both Sinn Féin personnel and members of the IRA Army Council.

8. At the last such meeting, the Army Council personnel said that they would be prepared to consider a cease-fire in return for a guarantee of "meaningful talks" with the British, either at political or civil service level. Bishop Daly saw this as a considerable movement forward from previous positions which demanded "declarations of intent", etc. In putting forward their proposal, the IRA leaders said it reflected no weakness in equipment or personnel - in fact the direct opposite was the case - but was an effort on their part to contribute to the peace process.
9. In the light of this development, it was decided that the Cardinal and Archbishop Eames should approach the Secretary of State and convey the proposal directly to him. This was done a few days before the Cardinal left for Lourdes. As a result of the Cardinal's death, the only report on what occurred at this meeting came from Archbishop Eames and he was "not to be trusted in any way". According to Eames, Brooke said he would reflect on the development but gave the impression that any encouragement or response on his part might be unhelpful to the present talks initiative. Eames said the British also wondered if the names of the Army Council personnel might be conveyed to them in order to help authenticate the proposal; Daly thought this an appalling reflection on the credibility of the Chaplains as well as having possible safety implications for both the Chaplains and their contacts.
10. Bishop Daly went on to say that, while he recognised the "immense moral dilemma" of any contact with Sinn Féin and the IRA, it would be regrettable if the present feelers from this quarter were left unanswered. He did not know,

however, how to take the issue further at this stage.

International Fund

11. Finally, Bishop Daly spoke very warmly of the Board and the work of the International Fund, and in particular their efforts in West Belfast and other disadvantaged areas.


Dermot Gallagher,
27 July, 1990.

cc: PST; PSM; Mr. Nally; PSS; Mr. Brosnan; Ms. Anderson.