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Visit to Northern Ireland - 19 February 1985

During the course of the visit, I had separate meetings with Bishop Cathal Daly of Down and Connor, SDLP chairman Alban Maginnis, SDLP Chief Whip Eddie McGrady, Christopher Napier, who was accompanied by a solicitor working in his office, Jim Fitzpatrick owner of the Irish News and Peter Montalier, editor of the paper.

Bishop Daly looked more tired and frail than I have ever seen him. Among the points he made were the following:

- he met Hurd a few weeks ago for a general exchange of views.
- The time is now opportune for movement towards a political arrangement which both nationalists and unionists could support. He considers that the sooner something is done the better. Both nationalists and unionists are expecting proposals to emerge from the Anglo-Irish talks. Unnecessary delay could give an advantage to those who would not wish to see Anglo-Irish arrangements, including both unionists and Sinn Fein.
- Sinn Fein is relatively weak at present. Nothing else could explain the persistence of Gerry Adams in trying to seek a meeting with the SDLP and with himself. In his replies to Adams he has responded in such a way that were a meeting to take place Adams would be humiliated. Yet Adams persists. Adams clearly sees himself as the political leader of Belfast Catholics while the Bishop is the spiritual leader. He must also feel sure that he would gain from a meeting with

the Bishop. Likewise, despite Hume's public humiliation of Adams when he referred to him as a puppet and said he would only meet the Army Council, Adams persists in asking for a meeting. All of this is an indication not of strength but of weakness.

- It is not easy for him to refuse to meet a man for whom he has pastoral responsibility. He will not however meet him. He offered to have one of his senior clergymen meet him but Adams refused.
- The economic situation on the ground in West Belfast is very bad and it will have to be dealt with in order to deny the Provisionals a breeding ground.
- Many of his priests complain that the RUC are not interested in policing in West Belfast, an area in which there is a real need for policing. Stolen cars are abandoned (or parked) from time to time in church grounds and his priests not infrequently ring the RUC, to whom they are known telling them of this and that they will remain with the cars until the police arrive thus preventing booby traps etc. They frequently have to wait for hours even though they themselves might be in considerable danger. While it is true that the RUC have reason to fear operating in West Belfast where they have been set up and shot, nonetheless he feels that they have no real interest in policing nationalist territory like West Belfast.
- When he met Hurd the latter told him that he intended setting up new police complaints procedures, including a new Police Complaints Authority. He asked the Bishop if Catholics would serve, to which the Bishop replied that they would if it were part of a major package involving the Irish Government, but they would not do so if it were established on its own.

- In his conversations with Hurd he stressed that changes must come soon. The two words he laid stress in his talks with Hurd were "process" and "gradualism". He does not see a solution as of now. Neither Irish unity nor the continuation of the union in its present form is possible. What is possible and is necessary is progress being made towards a solution.
- Hurd also met last week with a fairly large group of priests from his diocese. They were appalled by the insensitive manner in which he defended the UDR. This contrasted with his more sophisticated approach when speaking with the Bishop.
- The UDR are totally unacceptable within nationalist areas and on the periphery of nationalist areas. He would prefer to see them disbanded but he recognised that unionists see them as an essential element in their defence against the enemy within - the nationalist community. He accepts and understands that great caution is needed in calling for change in the UDR.
- He raised the legislation now going through the Dail concerning the availability of contraceptives. He did not express an opinion on the measure itself but said he was horrified by the public differences within the hierarchy. He said they had learned their lesson and would in future have the necessary machinery to enable them to consult and to speak with one voice.

Alban Maginnis, who was elected Chairman of the SDLP at the last party conference, is in his mid-thirties and has a good practice at the Bar mostly in the civil field. Among the points he made were the following:

- he does not intend to act as chairman for more than two years.
- the SDLP meeting in Derry at the weekend was very good and very constructive. One reason for this is that they were encouraged by the good atmosphere at the recent party conference.
- it was noticeable that Mallon consistently supported Hume during the weekend.
- there was a great deal of discussion about the future role of the Irish Government, whether it should be consultative or executive. He would not be concerned about the wording. He would be satisfied if the Irish Government has an active, positive role in Belfast.
- the parliamentary tier is, in his view, very important. It must provide a role for those who were elected to the Assembly such as Frank Feeley, Paddy O'Donoghue and Pascal O'Hare but should not be dependent on their pursuing an active role in the Assembly. If some formula were involved which enabled them to take their place in an Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier by signing on as it were in the Assembly then that might prove acceptable. They might be prepared to enter the Assembly solely to enable them to perform an active role in the parliamentary tier. They should not be asked to continuously participate in the Assembly.
- there was total support at the weekend meeting for Hume's proposed meeting with the IRA Army Council and some disappointment was expressed at the attitude of the Taoiseach, especially at the stated decision to break up any meeting. They accept that the Government does not want a rift with the SDLP and that view is reciprocated.

- he praised the efforts of the Minister for Foreign Affairs in defending Northern nationalists.
- Pascal O'Hare is not going to run in the local government elections, one reason being to enable Maginnis to get a seat on Belfast City Council and consequently a political profile. O'Hare, who was elected for the Assembly, will continue to be a member of the constituency reps.
- he thinks the SDLP may get eight seats in the local government elections - 2 in Ardoyne (Brian Feeney plus one), 2 in North Belfast (himself plus one), 2 in Upper Falls (Ben Caraher and Mary Muldoon), 1 in Lower Falls (Hendron) and possibly 1 in South Belfast (perhaps Alistair McDonnell). [I would feel that he may be over optimistic. The present position is that the SDLP have 6 seats. Both Mallon and Hendron feel they could lose one or two seats].

I met Eddie McGrady shortly after the SDLP meeting with Hurd, on which I have reported elsewhere. Among the other points he made were

- the weekend meeting in Derry was very good.
- Hume said that he and Mallon had been briefed by the Government but that they were not in a position to say what had been said. McGrady is unhappy at this.
- Mallon has come down out of the clouds. His feet are now firmly on the ground. He is no longer talking about the disbandment of the RUC but of changes in the RUC. McGrady had never heard Mallon being so realistic. He said he understood the Minister for Foreign Affairs had spoken to him, a matter which he appreciated.

- McGrady would like to see a reconstituted RUC divided into two groups, one to deal with terrorism and the other to deal with ordinary crime. The latter might to some extent be locally based so as to reflect local concerns and perhaps have an element of local recruitment.
- he was happy with the SDLP meeting with Hurd. The press afterwards had concentrated on what might have been said about Hume's talks with the IRA and the SDLP had not therefore been pressed on the subject of what had been said.
- the unionist response to the proposed Hume-IRA meeting is not any way as negative as might have been expected. Their view, as expressed to him, is that if he succeeds well and good, if not nothing has been lost. They accept his total rejection of violence and the message has got home that the only thing he wants to talk about is how to stop the violence. He has no doubt that the vast majority of nationalists support Hume on this issue.
- he would prefer the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental talks to reach a conclusion before entering into any talks with the unionists.

Among the points made by Jim Fitzpatrick were the following:

- he met Caoimhin O Caolain again last week. O Caolain stressed that there is a deep difference of interest between Sinn Fein, of which he is the national organiser, and the IRA. O'Caolain said that IRA activities had frequently proved damaging to the political position of Sinn Fein. O Caolain did not say that Sinn Fein does not support the IRA. [I would have little doubt but that the purpose is to try to

convince Fitzpatrick that Sinn Fein is a legitimate political party trying to distance itself from the IRA. I would also guess that Fitzpatrick believes this].

- O Caolain said that neither Adams, Morrison, nor himself knew what the Army Council's reaction would be to Hume's invitation to talks. The decision had been taken very quickly and neither Adams nor himself had been consulted. He thinks the SDLP will eventually agree to talk to Sinn Fein.
- Now that he is national organiser for Sinn Fein he had hoped to relinquish his job as managing director of An Phoblacht but with the recent death of the editor that will not now be possible. He is devoting a great deal of time to organising Sinn Fein in the South and is determined to build up the organisation in Britain.
- O Caolain told Fitzpatrick that An Phoblacht is now in a very healthy position and that it is covering itself financially. They have a small fleet of vans to deliver it around the country and the fleet is renewed every two years.
- Fitzpatrick also feels that Sinn Fein has failed to deliver on its promises. The violence has not achieved its ends. An alternative focus would help. The Catholic Church, since Cathal Daly became Bishop, is having some success in this area and the leisure centres set up with large amounts of public funds are a good help in keeping youngsters off the streets. In his view Sinn Fein is at a point where it could lose significant support.
- He would hope that the two governments can reach an agreement and that they do so sooner rather than

later. The momentum built up by the Forum Report and by the Taoiseach's meeting with Mrs. Thatcher has not been lost, despite the press conferences following the last Summit. It could however dissipate if there is undue delay.

He said that when Cardinal O'Flaich heard that the Government planned to introduce the family Planning Bill he drove straight to Dublin to speak with Bishop McNamara and was horrified that McNamara had already issued a public statement.

Montalier is the son of an American father and an East Belfast Presbyterian mother. He was brought up in East Belfast, though his secondary education was in boarding school, Portora in Enniskillen. Before joining the Irish News a few years ago as news editor he had worked for a number of years as a layout specialist for the Newsletter. He struck me as a shallow man without any deep understanding of either community in Northern Ireland. He writes most of the editorials and was responsible for that which criticised the Minister. He readily volunteered that Fitzpatrick had given him a "roasting" for that editorial. His editorial style is not unlike that of a newspaper such as the Sun or the Express and his purpose seems to be to shock his readers into giving a response rather than attempting to give weighty or fruitful comment.

Montalier believes that support for Provisional Sinn Fein peaked two elections ago. He does not think that their advice centres are delivering on the ground. He mentioned that his mother works in a citizens advice bureau (state funded) in the Lower Falls area and that she gets a very large number of enquiries from persons who had initially brought their problems to Sinn Fein but the latter had been unable to help. A further indication of their relative lack of support is that they now have but one all Ireland edition of An Phoblacht, where in the

past they had a Northern and Southern edition. There is now less local news and less local support. He believes its circulation has declined. If circumstances were right he thinks that large numbers of Sinn Fein voters would desert that party.

It is not without significance that unionist politicians are avoiding the limelight. Paisley went off to Africa and little is to be heard of Molyneux. He is certain the British are laying down conditions and that the unionists are awaiting developments. The unionists, in his view, are prepared to go a considerable way towards meeting Hume but only if the killing has stopped, or decreased significantly. Unionist dislike of the English is increasing as is their mistrust of them. He said that Hurd is particularly disliked by unionists because of what is seen as his superior stand offish manner.

Napier wanted to see me mainly about some individual prisoner cases in the Maze. He mentioned that there appears to him to be very undue and unusual delay in processing the cases (of which there are now five or six) which he has taken to the European Commission of Human Rights, beginning last October, claiming that particular arrests under the emergency legislation in Northern Ireland are not in compliance with Britains' obligations under the Convention on Human Rights, now that Britian has formally withdrawn her derogations from sections of that Convention.

Napier feels it is important that a Catholic or Catholics should be appointed judges in the County Courts (the equivalent of our Circuit Courts). Of the eight judges in the criminal court (Diplock) two are Catholics, which is a fair proportion. But Catholics are greatly underrepresented in the County Courts, despite the availability of Suitable Candidates.

Dai

Daithi O'Ceallaigh
20 February, 1985

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