

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting with Cardinal Conway

1. The Minister and I called with Cardinal Conway yesterday morning 17 September. Dr Simpson explained to the Cardinal that as it was some time since he had last had the opportunity of a discussion he would be interested to know how the Cardinal saw, and felt about, the present situation.
2. The Cardinal said that we had now had several weeks of comparative peace for which he was most thankful, but we needed at least 12 months before the wounds would be completely healed. He felt, however, there was a skin forming over these wounds and while this grew thicker as the days passed it could still be easily broken. Continued peace and unremitting application to the reform programme presented the best prospects for reaching a stable situation.
3. He hoped that 12 months peace would be possible and that, as he put it, there would not be an over-reaction by the security forces to incidents although he realised how difficult a job the Army had had. In this context the Cardinal instanced the Curfew in the lower Falls and the shooting of young O'Hagan. In these cases he said there was a very strong feeling among his people and that errors of judgment had been made in high places. He was very perturbed about O'Hagan's death because earlier he had pleaded with the authorities not to make a Catholic martyr. Yet if one had tried to pick out a name calculated to produce a martyr situation and a reaction to it one could not have picked a more telling one than "Danny O'Hagan". He said the reaction to this shooting had been so sharp because it had occurred in an incident which had started from stone-throwing - which he could not condone - but emphasised there had been no corresponding reaction to Catholics who had been shot in a situation where the armed forces had indeed themselves been under rifle fire. He also told us that he had received reports from several people which showed that there was doubt about the warnings which the Army stated had been given at the time of O'Hagan's death. He went on to voice his concern over the shootings

at St Matthew's Church and gave us an account of it as it had been reported to him, the essence of which was that there were reasonable grounds for believing the Church was going to be attacked. We debated these two matters with the Cardinal and the difficulties inherent in them. In the course of this discussion the Cardinal made it clear that he was not standing in moral judgment of the incidents but wished to make clear the depth of feeling which was being expressed and brought to him.

4. The Cardinal said he felt dismayed that there appeared to be a drift to the 'right' in the Unionist party particularly in the country areas which he felt could eventually provoke trouble. He went on to say that whilst the reform programme had been a great step forward he was disappointed in the way some matters had turned out and in the rate of progress generally. He had hoped for something much closer to the Race Relations Act than had in fact been produced. He was also uneasy about the Declarations of Equality of Employment Opportunity and the adoption of the Codes of Employment. He believed that in some instances the actual Declarations were qualified in such a way as to detract from their force. Nor could he see that the Codes of Employment were so cast as to ensure that say the Armagh Council could *not* continue to employ only Protestants. He gave it as his opinion that it was very difficult for a Catholic applicant for employment to prove he had suffered an injustice in not securing a job. We discussed this point with His Eminence at some length pointing out that the Codes had now fairly general acceptance and in turn that the Commissioner for Complaints had very wide powers of investigation.

5. The Cardinal said he was bitterly disappointed in the Housing Executive Bill for it seemed to him that the Executive was going to be frustrated by a huge Council continually breathing down its neck. He was worried too that this Council, which was to be composed of Chairmen of local authorities, would therefore contain few representatives of the minority. He appeared to be particularly upset by Clause 3(1) which he said if he construed it properly seemed to mean that proposals for new housing projects could not be initiated

by the Executive but only by the Ministry asking the Executive to produce proposals. He felt this restricted the Executive far too much. The Minister promised to look at this point and obtain a Ministry of Development view on it.

6. Cardinal Conway told us that another matter which was causing considerable concern amongst Catholics stemmed from incidents started by Linfield Supporters returning from a match at the Oval. As he understood the situation these supporters had been rowdy and badly behaved and two policemen who had tried to deal with them in Ann Street had received a severe beating-up for their pains. The continued progress of this group of supporters had led to incidents with Catholics further on (Unity Flats) as a result of which two Catholic youths had been prosecuted. Arising from the affair two Protestants had been prosecuted for attacking the policeman who had been badly hurt and kicked. The Protestants had received fines for being drunk and disorderly but the two Catholic youths had been given six months. This gave rise to uneasiness about the nature of the charges preferred by the police.

7. His Eminence was critical of the BBC and we discussed the programme "Christians at War". He considered no good could come from the programme. He had received many enquiries from people in Britain about it and in turn he had done his best to try and assure people that we were not engaged in a religious war but that social questions such as housing, employment, etc all came into it.

8. He asked if it would be possible to intervene in any way with the Belfast News Letter to try and see if they would be amenable to reasoning about the great harm which their headlines were doing. Whenever there was some misfortune or calamity the News Letter seemed to bring it out in its worst possible light and, often he felt, in a provocative way. Cardinal Conway said that he realised the Irish News could be guilty too at times but he really felt the News Letter was much worse.

9. As we were leaving the Cardinal touched on minority representation on public boards and bodies and expressed misgivings about some recent appointments. Without wishing to be critical of the man, he felt for example Mr Frank Benner's appointment to the Police Authority was not a good one. This gave us an opportunity of raising the question of views currently being expressed that the Government did not appoint radical enough Catholic people to Committees etc. We pointed out that if one appointed Catholics for their radical standing this immediately opened up the way for Ultra Protestants to claim representation or to be put forward. The Cardinal took this point and obviously felt uneasy about the prospect of producing a situation of hard line versus hard line and seemed to be against creating it. He agreed it was very difficult to strike a balance as between radicals on the one hand and what were termed "Castle Catholics" on the other. It was useful to bring this difficulty to the Cardinal's attention.

10. All the various matters raised were debated at some length, the Cardinal putting forward his viewpoint and the Minister replying with the Government view. The discussion while forthright was conducted in a friendly way. The Cardinal emphasised that he was trying to put before us the problems which were giving concern to his people. The Minister thanked Cardinal Conway for receiving us and said he felt it had been a very useful exchange and we would now look at what had been said and in particular the point about the Housing Executive.



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18 September 1970

Ministry of Community Relations
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