

STATE PAPERS

Vatican lobbied to issue papal statement denouncing IRA violence

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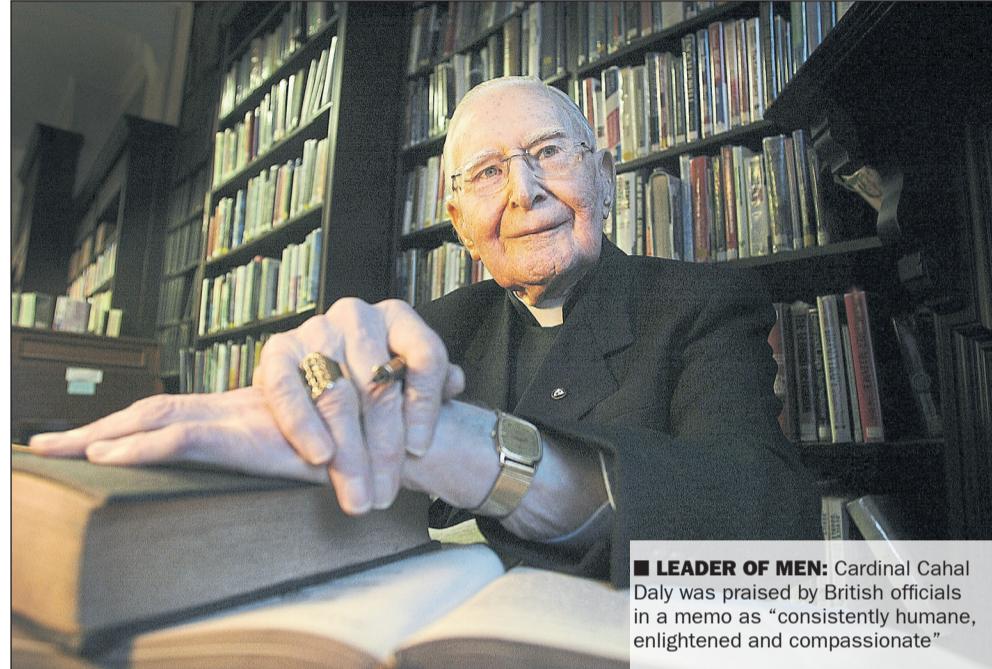
THE British ambassador in Dublin and officials in Belfast lobbied the Vatican to authorise a papal statement denouncing IRA violence to be read at Masses across Ireland, government files reveal.

The idea was first floated in a letter between two Northern Ireland Office (NIO) officials in January 1990 and later discussed in a meeting between the ambassador, Sir Nicholas Fenn, and the new Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Emmanuel Gerada.

The NIO's Brian Blackwell proposed a memo he had drafted for discussion, entitled 'The Holy See and Violence in Northern Ireland'.

It recalled that at a recent meeting with Ambassador Fenn in Dublin, Archbishop Gerada disclosed that he was "contemplating advising the papacy to make some new move to condemn the IRA".

Mr Blackwell said any statement should acknowledge the



LEADER OF MEN: Cardinal Cahal Daly was praised by British officials in a memo as "consistently humane, enlightened and compassionate"

"fundamental legitimacy... of an elected democracy" and the "sinfulness of violence".

However, he felt that there

might be a clerical fear that "not everything that has been and is being done by the state to combat terrorism is moral-

ly irreproachable".

The Church's condemnation might also be seen as one-sided in what some Catholics

saw as "a dirty war".

The best approach, Mr Blackwell informed officials, might be "a papal statement issued from the Vatican to be read from the pulpit at all Masses in Catholic churches in Ireland on an appropriate Sunday in 1990".

Such a statement should both support the British government policies in Northern Ireland while condemning IRA violence.

The official also suggested that the nuncio might encourage the recruitment of Catholics into the Police Authority and security forces, pointing to Bishop Cahal Daly's recent support for Catholics joining the RUC.

The NIO's approach won the support of Sir Ken Bloomfield, head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, who said in a note to Ian Burns, the deputy under secretary of state at the NIO, that a papal statement might have a useful impact on "the moral ditherers, if not on the hard men".

A note from the ambassa-

dor summarising a meeting in February 1990 with Mr Burns and the nuncio states that Archbishop Gerada was receptive to a "papal message".

In conversation, he recalled, Mr Burns had "distinguished between the consistently humane, enlightened and compassionate Cahal Daly and the less helpful... Cardinal Ó Fiaich and Father Des Wilson [the west Belfast-based human rights activist]".

Archbishop Gerada was said to have commented under his breath that Cahal Daly was "a leader of men; unfortunately, Tom Ó Fiaich was not".

The ambassador arranged to meet the nuncio before his return to Rome to meet the Pope in May.

Earlier this year a previous dispatch of state papers revealed British attempts to influence the appointment of a successor to Cardinal Ó Fiaich following his death in May 1990.

Cahal Daly was named the new Archbishop of Armagh in November that year.

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