

STATE PAPERS

NIO hoped bishop could influence SDLP leader

Éamon Phoenix

THE British government believed the late Bishop Edward Daly could help overcome John Hume's resistance to talks with unionists in the late 1980s.

Declassified files from 1989 released today highlight the Northern Ireland Office's mounting frustration with the then SDLP leader's ambivalence on all-party talks. The details are included in a memo from senior NIO official DC Kirk to Northern Ireland Minister of State Brian Mawhinney, dated March 7 1989.

The NIO needed to make it plain to Hume, he wrote, that they wanted to know "the SDLP's attitude towards practical steps forward".

In a further memo for Mr Mawhinney, ahead of a meeting with Bishop Edward Daly on March 7 1989, Kirk – from the Constitutional and Political Division of the NIO – stated that the bishop had been involved for many years in helping people under his pas-

■ **'MESSAGE BEARER':** Bishop Edward Daly with a photograph of John Hume taken by press photographer Willie Carson



“With his beliefs and position he can influence Mr Hume

– DC Kirk

toral care to come to terms with the effects of the Troubles.

“He is very active on the ground, helping prisoners' families and on housing matters but he is wary of becoming

too closely identified with any party,” the memo stated.

The bishop had suggested that those who supported Provisional IRA “should excommunicate themselves”.

Mr Kirk told the minister: “[Bishop Daly] has in the past stressed his view that the Sinn Féin vote in Derry is not a reflection of support for violence but of the community's alienation at a lack of economic, social and political progress.

“He feels that constitutional politics must succeed or Sinn

Féin support will continue to grow. With his beliefs and position he can influence Mr Hume.”

The official felt that the bishop, who died earlier this month, would not want to act as an “intermediary” but he could serve as “a message-bearer”.

Mr Kirk suggested that Dr Mawhinney might see the objective of his meeting with Bishop Daly “to listen to what the bishop has to say about recent developments (for example on education and the RUC) and to encourage him to disseminate a constructive message about the government's intentions and the role that the SDLP has to play in achieving progress”.

He suggests the minister might ask “how can constitutional nationalists and unionists find common ground?”

According to the papers, the minister could have also suggested to the bishop that devolution would give local people “real power over, for example, education policy – surely desirable”.

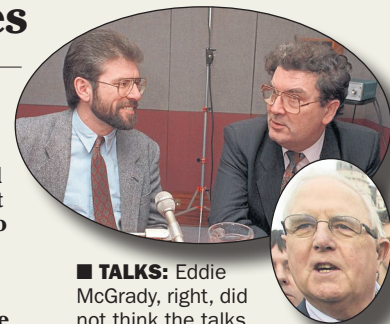
McGrady opposed Hume-Adams – files

Éamon Phoenix

THE late South Down MP Eddie McGrady was opposed to the Hume-Adams talks and believed the republican movement could not be persuaded to give up violence.

The thoughts of the SDLP veteran, who died in 2013, have surfaced in the confidential files released today by Proni.

In a memo to the then secretary of state Tom King on September 14 1988, EC Hallett of the Northern Ireland Office's Political Affairs Division reported on a meeting with Mr McGrady in Downpatrick. It notes how the MP was “clearly relieved” that the SDLP/Sinn Féin talks had stalled. “He made it clear that he never had any faith in this exercise and he refused to be part of the SDLP team for the talks,” the papers state. “In his view, there had never been any prospect of persuading Sinn Féin to abandon the armed struggle. Sinn Féin's lack of sincerity had been demonstrated by the fact that violence had escalated while the talks were going on.” Mr McGrady was also



■ **TALKS:** Eddie McGrady, right, did not think the talks between Gerry Adams and John Hume would work

dismissive of a potential split in the republican movement between the political and military wings.

The official informed the secretary of state that in contrast to party colleague Seamus Mallon, Mr McGrady believed that the only conceivable way in which progress could be made in the immediate future was through talks between the north's political parties about devolution.

“He is under no illusions (unlike some of his colleagues) that the unionists can be persuaded to talk to Dublin,” the official notes. “McGrady feels that it is for the SDLP to take the initiative and is doing his best to persuade his executive of this.”

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