

STATE PAPERS Belfast and Dublin



Today sees the release of previously confidential files from Stormont and the Northern Ireland Office covering 1988. The Public Record Office (PRONI) in Belfast have released files relating to 1988 as they move from the 30 year to 20 Year Rule. The 20 Year Rule, endorsed by the assembly in 2011, is being phased in over 10 years with two years' worth of records being released each year. The previously confidential files can be inspected at PRONI in Belfast's Titanic Quarter from today. Reporting on the Belfast files for *The Irish News* is **Dr Éamon Phoenix**, principal lecturer in history at Stranmillis University College. A broadcaster and commentator, he is a member of the Taoiseach's Advisory Group on Centenaries. Additional reporting by Press Association

Bishops voice deep anger over alienation of Catholic population

THE Northern Catholic bishops voiced deep anger at the extent to which British government policy in Northern Ireland in the mid-1980s alienated the Catholic population.

A meeting between Catholic Primate Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, pictured, senior bishops and NI secretary Douglas Hurd took place on December 3, 1984.

Bishop Edward Daly spoke of his dismay in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish summit when British prime minister Margaret Thatcher rejected the report of the New Ireland Forum. She appeared to have

rejected it out of hand, he told Mr Hurd.

The British government seemed to analyse the situation in terms only of security, with violence being the major problem. The Derry prelate thought that the security problems were a symptom of political and economic difficulties.

The bishop thought that the minority were more distanced than ever from the institutions of government. Constitutional nationalism deserved better of the British government than what had come out of the summit.

More generally, Bishop Daly

said that the NIO's perceptions of the nationalist community did not correspond to reality: "The minority felt that there was no place for them in NI and were thus reluctant to agree to be governed by the institutions of the state. If the SDLP entered the assembly, they would be finished in a week."

Defending Mrs Thatcher's 'out, out, out' comments, Mr Hurd argued that there had been a good discussion at the summit itself and the PM had not intended to be insulting. However, on the Irish Dimension, he thought joint authority would not be workable.



For his part, Bishop Daly said: "Northern Ireland was an artificial political entity and unless the government showed itself willing to face down the unionists, the mi-

nority would not believe there was a place for them in it."

Bishop Cahal Daly agreed, pointing to the need for some kind of power-sharing executive and a recognition for the right of the Republic to be able to express its view.

"Constitutional nationalists had nothing to show for their efforts over many years and, unless some form of power-sharing were introduced, the terrorists would remain well placed to cultivate a pre-revolutionary situation throughout the whole of Ireland."

For his part, Mr Hurd felt the forum report had moved

discussion forward and the Irish Dimension had not been rejected. However, Bishop Edward Daly said the attitudes of unionists had not changed, as reflected in the actions of unionist-controlled councils. It was urgently necessary to give the nationalist minority some share in power.

Finally, Bishop Cahal Daly underscored the degree of alienation in the nationalist population: "The government of the Republic must necessarily be involved since 40 per cent of the people in the North thought of themselves as Irish people, not Ulster people."



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Cardinal urged release of UVF killer Spence

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CATHOLIC Primate Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich pressed authorities for the release of the prominent UVF killer Gusty Spence claiming he could help convince loyalist paramilitaries to work towards peace. Spence, a former soldier with the Royal Irish Rifles, was sentenced to 20 years in jail in 1966 for the murder of a young Catholic barman, Peter Ward, at a Shankill Road pub in west Belfast.

State papers show that the then cardinal raised the issue of the treatment of prisoners at a meeting of Catholic churchmen with the secretary of state Douglas Hurd at Stormont House on December 3, 1984.

The previously confidential documents released this week show the cardinal had told the then secretary of state that he recommended the release of Spence who was freed in 1984. "He himself visited members of Protestant paramilitary groups in prison and had recommended the release of Spence. He thought the release of Spence could influence Protestants to give up violence," the documents revealed. The prominent loyalist, who



died in 2011, would go on to read the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) ceasefire statement a decade later in October 1994.

On his release from prison he became a leading member of the UVF-linked PUP and was involved in the peace negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement. He also set up the Shankill Activity Centre, a government-supported initiative to provide training opportunities for unemployed young people. Roy Garland, who wrote the biography *Gusty Spence, from Hardman to Peacemaker*, said while he was "not surprised" by the development he thought Spence may not have even been aware of the intervention. "I knew they were in contact and were in fact good friends and would have exchanged

letters and Christmas cards, but he never mentioned that the cardinal lobbied for his release. He may not even have been aware of it", Mr Garland said.

"It doesn't really surprise me though. While no-one would try and paint Gusty Spence as an angel he was a force for good and change from within loyalism and had certainly helped bring peace and stabilise loyalists within the prison."

"I do know he had spoken to republicans as well, including Billy McMillan (Official IRA), who he had met in prison. "On his release he encouraged others, including David Ervine and Billy Mitchell to get involved in politics and so in that respect you can see what angle the cardinal was coming from," he said.