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FUNERALS IN BELFAST

Although overshadowed by the attack on mourners at Milltown Cemetery on Wednesday, the reverse of policing policy at the Farrell/MCann/Savage and McCracken funerals this week was an important and positive development. There now appears to be an understanding between the RUC and the IRA that no paramilitary dress will be worn and no vollies fired at IRA funerals. As in the case of funerals in Belfast last year and recent funerals in Armagh, vollies were fired in nationalist areas prior to the funeral ceremonies. The RUC did not take any special security measures against these actions, but Mr. King said on television (Newsnight, Thursday) that television companies recording these scenes should "consider their position".

The Department maintained close contact with clergy and SDLP politicians in Belfast and with the British authorities through the Secretariat. We strongly encouraged the security forces to stay away from the funerals on the grounds that such security was itself likely to precipitate clashes and play into the hands of the IRA. The Tánaiste issued a statement on Tuesday urging the greatest restraint on all sides. Bishop Cahal Daly spoke directly to Mr. King and also to the Chief Constable and gave it as his confident view that IRA assurances of no paramilitary dress/vollies could be accepted. He believes that this is now a firm policy of the IRA in Belfast and that the RUC have changed tack in response, at least for the time being. This was confirmed by the lack of presence of the security forces at the McCracken funeral, despite questions raised about the RUC failure to prevent the attack on Milltown Cemetery on Wednesday and Unionist criticism of the RUC for surrendering their policing function to Sinn Fein.

Two men are in police custody, Michael Stone and Robert Montgomery of East Belfast, in relation to the Milltown attack. Both appear to have UVF connections (which tends to be

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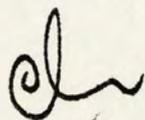
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confirmed by the type of weapons used and by the claim made by the Protestant Action Force (a UVF front) to the BBC) but the RUC has not yet provided definitive information. Charges of RUC collusion with the attack were strenuously denied by Mr. King in the House of Commons on Thursday. However, a number of questions need to be cleared up by the RUC, for example, the function of a police van at the scene. The Department has asked through the Secretariat for information on the incident.

Mr. King responded publicly to statements in the sermons of Fr. Murray at the Farrell requiem Mass, Fr. Toner at the McCann/Savage Mass and Fr. Denny at the McCracken Mass. Fr. Murray described the operation of the British security forces in Gibraltar as a barbarous assassination; Fr. Toner described the killings as murder, like killings of RUC men and soldiers, unless it could be said that a state of war existed; Fr. Denny described the people of West Belfast as "more sinned against than sinning". In his statement to the House of Commons, Mr. King urged people to mind what they say as much as what they do. He was somewhat more critical on BBC Television. In response, Bishop Cahal Daly said the priests were articulating the feelings of people in West Belfast. (The Bishop played a decisive part in the choice of Frs Denny and Toner to say mass and accepted the nomination by the Farrell family of Fr Murray of Armagh.)

The Taoiseach immediately condemned the horrific attack on Milltown Cemetery on Wednesday and appealed for calm.

Disturbances in Belfast were less than might have been expected. The most serious incident involved the burning out of two Protestant homes in North Belfast.



Declan O'Donovan,
18 March 1988.

c.c. A-I Section