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TO PRIORITY F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 1959 OF 25 JUNE

INFO NIO LONDON, NIO BELFAST, BIS NEW YORK, DUBLIN

MY TELNOS 1930 AND 1931: NORTHERN IRELAND:

MEETING WITH THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND

1. I REALISE THE ANNOYANCE THAT INTERFERENCE BY AMERICAN POLITICIANS IN OUR AFFAIRS CAUSES IN LONDON AND BELFAST, WHERE WE ARE HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE VERY REAL AND SERIOUS PROBLEMS RAISED BY THE HUNGER STRIKE. THE IGNORANT AND PARTISAN NATURE OF A LOT OF AMERICAN COMMENT IS A FURTHER AGGRAVATION AND ONE IS TEMPTED TO ARGUE THAT, WHILE WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO DO ALL IN OUR POWER TO INFLUENCE OPINION HERE, WE SHOULD NOT EVEN CONSIDER ALLOWING POSITIONS ADOPTED IN THE UNITED STATES TO INFLUENCE OUR POLICY DECISIONS.

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2. I CERTAINLY DO NOT TAKE AT FACE VALUE EVERYTHING THAT WAS SAID YESTERDAY BY THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND, WHO HAPPEN TO BE FEELING THE HEAT IN THEIR CONSTITUENCIES. IF MORE HUNGER STRIKERS DIE, I WOULD EXPECT SOME HARSH THINGS TO BE SAID ABOUT US IN PUBLIC, EVEN BY MODERATE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS. BUT THOSE SAME MEMBERS ARE WELL AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF APPEARING TO ENDORSE TERRORISM AND WILL BE WARY OF GOING TOO FAR. FOR ITS PART, THE US GOVERNMENT, WHILE UNDOUBTEDLY HOPING THAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING TO MAKE THE PROBLEM GO AWAY, WILL ALSO BE CAREFUL TO AVOID SAYING ANYTHING WHICH COULD SMACK OF INTERFERENCE IN OUR AFFAIRS OR RUN COUNTER TO THEIR STRONG OPPOSITION TO TERRORISM. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT, IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, THEY WILL SAY NOTHING AT ALL. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY THE WHITE HOUSE THAT THE PRESIDENT, WITH HIS IRISH AMERICAN BACKGROUND, IS TAKING AN INTEREST IN THE HUNGER STRIKE AND IS REGULARLY BRIEFED ON DEVELOPMENTS.

3. THE IMPORTANT POINT ABOUT AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE PROVISIONAL IRA RELIES UPON AMERICAN SUPPORT, BOTH POPULAR AND FINANCIAL. THE FACT THAT AMERICA IS THE PROVISIONALS' LARGEST SINGLE SOURCE OF MODERN WEAPONS IS ONLY ONE ASPECT OF THIS SUPPORT. WITHOUT AMERICAN SUPPORT, THE IRA WOULD COLLAPSE. FOR THAT REASON, WE CANNOT DISMISS AMERICAN VIEWS AS OF NO CONSEQUENCE. IF WE ARE FACED WITH MORE HUNGER STRIKE DEATHS NOR WILL, WITH INCREASING SUCCESS EXPLOIT THE LATENT ATAVISM OF THE IRISH AMERICAN COMMUNITY. WE MUST ALSO BEAR IN MIND THE DAMAGING IMPACT ON US INVESTMENT OF THE SCENES OF VIOLENCE IN BELFAST AND LONDONDERRY WHICH HAVE AND WILL AGAIN BE SHOWN ON AMERICAN TELEVISION. WE KNOW OF US COMPANIES WHO HAVE BEEN FRIGHTENED AWAY FROM POTENTIAL INVESTMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND DURING THE LAST FEW WEEKS.

4. NO RESPONSIBLE AMERICAN LEADER IS ASKING US TO CONCEDE POLITICAL STATUS. NOR DO IRISH AMERICANS LEADERS SEEM CONCERNED AT PRESENT ABOUT LONG-TERM POLICY ON THE FUTURE OF THE NORTH. WHAT THEY ARE SUGGESTING IS THAT IF WE ARE TO AVOID PERMANENT DAMAGE TO THE MODERATE CAUSE WE MUST DO ENOUGH BY WAY OF CHANGES IN PRISON RULES TO ENABLE THEM AND US TO UNDERCUT THE EXTREMISTS AND TO CONVINCED THOSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO GIVE US THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT THAT WE HAVE GONE AS FAR AS LEGITIMATELY POSSIBLE TO PREVENT MEN FROM GOING TO THEIR DEATHS.

5. TWO SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS HAVE BEEN PUT TO US: THE FIRST, FROM SENATOR KENNEDY'S STAFF, IS THAT WE GET TOGETHER WITH THOSE, LIKE THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE WHO

HAVE GONE AS FAR AS LEGITIMATELY POSSIBLE TO PREVENT MEN FROM GOING TO THEIR DEATHS.

*Already
reached*

5. TWO SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS HAVE BEEN PUT TO US: THE FIRST, FROM SENATOR KENNEDY'S STAFF, IS THAT WE GET TOGETHER WITH THOSE, LIKE THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE WHO HAVE PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE PRISON REGIME FALLING SHORT OF THE 5 DEMANDS, AND PERSUADE THEM TO AGREE TO SUPPORT A PACKAGE OF CHANGES WHICH WOULD CERTAINLY NOT AMOUNT TO POLITICAL STATUS BUT WHICH WOULD MEET GENUINE HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS. OUR CONDITION FOR INTRODUCING THESE CHANGES WOULD BE THE UNEQUIVOCAL SUPPORT OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE INDEPENDENT GROUPS THAT HAD ASKED FOR THEM. IN OTHER WORDS, WE WOULD EXPECT THOSE GROUPS TO STATE PUBLICLY THAT THE CHANGES WHICH WE HAD MADE WERE AS FAR AS WE COULD REASONABLY BE EXPECTED TO GO ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS, THAT THERE WAS NO CASE FOR FURTHER CHANGES AND NO CONCEIVABLE GROUND FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE HUNGER STRIKE. IF WE SUCCEEDED, THE STRONG SUPPORT OF GROUPS LIKE THE COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE WOULD BE A POWERFUL WEAPON IN UNDERCUTTING SUPPORT FOR THE HUNGER STRIKE. IF WE FAILED, WE COULD AT LEAST ARGUE CREDIBLY THAT WE HAD GONE THE LAST MILE AND THAT WE HAD DEMONSTRATED THAT, AS WE HAD ALWAYS FEARED, WE WERE REALLY THE SUBJECT OF SALAMI TACTICS, ON THE PART OF PEOPLE WHO, WHILE PROTESTING THE CONTRARY, WERE PUSHING US DOWN A ROAD WHICH WOULD LEAD INEXORABLY TO GRANTING OF THE 5 DEMANDS AMOUNTING TO POLITICAL STATUS. IF YOU CONSIDERED SUCH A WAY FORWARD WORTH PURSING, IT MIGHT ALSO BE WORTH WHILE TO APPROACH SOME OF THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND ON A SIMILAR BASIS AND FOR SIMILAR REASONS. AT THE VERY LEAST, WE WOULD SMOKE THEM OUT.

6. THE SECOND SUGGESTION, WHICH HAS BEEN MADE TO US ON AN INFORMAL AND PERSONAL BASIS BY A SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL, IS THAT WE SHOULD REVIEW OUR POLICY ON FORCE FEEDING. FORCE FEEDING IS USED IN US PRISONS AND THE ARGUMENT RUNS THAT IT IS NO MORE ACCEPTABLE TO ALLOW A PRISONER TO STARVE HIMSELF TO DEATH THAN IT IS TO ALLOW HIM TO HANG HIMSELF OR TO JUMP OUT OF A SIXTH FLOOR WINDOW. THE ARGUMENT GOES ON THAT, WITH MODERN MEDICAL TECHNIQUES, FORCE FEEDING WHICH IF NECESSARY IS DONE HERE INTRAVENIOUSLY IS NOT AS ETHICALLY OBJECTIONABLE AS IT ONCE WAS AND THAT, WHILE IT WOULD PROVOKE A STORM OF PROTEST, THAT WOULD BE INFINITELY PREFERABLE TO A WHOLE SERIES OF HUNGER STRIKE DEATHS, PARTICULARLY AS FAR AS AMERICAN OPINION IS CONCERNED.

7. I PASS ON THESE SUGGESTIONS, NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE BLINDINGLY ORIGINAL, BUT BECAUSE THEY SHOW AMERICAN CONCERN HERE THAT WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING WHICH COULD HELP THEM TO UNDERCUT PIRA AND THEIR AGENTS.

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8. I SHALL BE IN LONDON NEXT WEEK AND WILL OF COURSE BE AVAILABLE FOR DISCUSSION ON THIS IF YOU WISH.

HENDERSON

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