

CONFIDENTIAL and PERSONAL



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

29 May 1979

Ireland, fine
cc HO
FCO
Cob. Off.

*Subject copy in
PMS meeting with
Cardinal Hume.*

May 79

*Copied also
to Master Sec.*

Visit by Cardinal Hume

Cardinal Hume called on the Prime Minister on Friday afternoon for a personal and informal talk. The Prime Minister would like your Secretary of State to be aware of the main points that arose from the conversation.

Cardinal Hume referred initially to the request which Archbishop O'Fiaich had asked him to make for an interview with the former Prime Minister, Mr. Callaghan. He said he had then advised Archbishop O'Fiaich that any such meeting would be inappropriate during the election period, and that even if it were desirable afterwards, it could only be on the basis that the Archbishop had something specific to say or discuss and that the Prime Minister was given advance warning of it. The Cardinal asked whether Mrs. Thatcher would agree to see Archbishop O'Fiaich on this basis if he renewed his request. The Prime Minister agreed that it was pointless his seeking a meeting without being specific as to its purpose and said that, of course, she could not commit herself until she knew what that purpose was. She wholly agreed however that Cardinal Hume should repeat to Archbishop O'Fiaich what he had already said to him on this matter about the basis of any approach.

Cardinal Hume then referred to his general concern over the Northern Ireland problem, with particular reference to his own involvement with all sorts of people who were interested in Northern Ireland and, in particular, with the large Irish community in London. He expressed particular anxiety on three aspects:

- a. he echoed the worry that had already been expressed about the policy vacuum that had been created by a General Election which had been imminent for so long;
- b. he was concerned about the impact on moderate opinion of reports like the Bennett Report because they seemed to give ground for disquiet among moderate opinion because of alleged (and he emphasised that it was only alleged) ill-treatment and misdemeanour; and

/c. he was

c. he was personally worried in his conscience about certain persons now convicted and in jail because he had doubts about their guilt.

He referred in particular to four IRA prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs who told him that two of their compatriots who were allegedly involved in United Kingdom bombings were, in fact, innocent. His own concern in these cases was that the United Kingdom Government could get into a false position with regard to its policy on human rights if these allegations were true. He had in mind one man in particular who now had T.B., and with a 12-year sentence before him would certainly die in prison, although the Cardinal was morally satisfied of his innocence. The Cardinal emphasised that he was not attacking the Judiciary, nor seeking to "unpick" the Court's verdict, but he thought that a Royal Pardon might be appropriate in such a case. He suggested that he ought to take these matters up again with the Home Secretary.

The Prime Minister said that the Cardinal should certainly take up these cases with Mr. Whitelaw. What the Cardinal said had bothered her but she wondered whether it really was possible to find out the truth in these cases; one guilty man might well plead guilty to other crimes in order to secure an escape for one of his partners. Cardinal Hume emphasised that on all these matters he was only expressing a widespread anxiety: he fully accepted that one could not tamper with the Judiciary, and all that he was saying was that one case led him to be very uneasy.

On Northern Ireland policy generally, the Prime Minister said that it was certainly the Government's intention to make constructive proposals but she was very well aware of all the obstacles that lay before them. She emphasised that it had been necessary to create a new structure of local government in the hope that this would use some of the political energy of the various political groups in Ulster, but it had not worked out that way. It was a problem of will: there were plenty of solutions to all the problems but there was no will, so there was no solution. The Prime Minister reiterated that if Archbishop O'Fiaich wished to come across and talk to her about these matters she would see him either alone or with the Bishop of Derry. The Prime Minister's final comment on the general situation was that if there were no move to a political solution, her fear was that the Province would explode in violence, but it might be that only such an explosion would in fact secure a solution. Cardinal Hume responded by saying that tough measures might be necessary to change the situation but the IRA were very clever at exploiting a situation which they did not wish to see changed.

After the meeting with Cardinal Hume the Prime Minister said that she was concerned that the Cardinal seemed to have been impressed by the line that had been put to him by the IRA prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs about the innocence of their compatriots. She hoped that the Home Secretary would see the Cardinal in response to any approach he made, rather than write to him, and she suggested that it might well be desirable to let the Cardinal see the transcript of evidence on which the persons about whom he was concerned (whom he did not name) had been convicted.

/As regards

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As regards an approach from Archbishop O'Fiaich, the ball now lies in Cardinal Hume's court. If an approach is made, the Prime Minister will, of course, want your Secretary of State's advice on how it should be dealt with.

I am copying this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and to Sir John Hunt.

KRS

Joe Pilling, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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