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TELEGRAM NUMBER 149 OF 28 MARCH 1981

INFO GUATEMALA CITY

OUR TELNO 127: SECURITY SITUATION

1. THE DISASTROUS FIRES AND DISTURBANCES IN BELIZE CITY LAST WEEK WHICH RESULTED IN CALLING OUT THE DEFENCE FORCE AND POLICE TACTICAL SERVICES UNIT, HAVE GIVEN RISE TO RUMOURS OF AN IMPENDING CIVIL SERVICE STRIKE, DEMONSTRATIONS, ARSON, AND THREATS TO LIFE AND PROPERTY. MUCH OF MY TIME SINCE MY RETURN, THEREFORE HAS BEEN TAKEN UP WITH QUESTIONS OF SECURITY. THERE IS STILL SOME TENSION AND MANY SHOPS IN BELIZE CITY ARE BOARDED AND SHUTTERED, THE US CONSULATE HAS ASKED FOR PROTECTION, AND THE POLICE REMAIN AT FULL STRETCH, PATROLLING, GUARDING KEY POINTS, AND COVERING POLITICAL MEETINGS. THE DEFENCE FORCE IS ON PERMANENT STANDBY. A NEW UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT CALLING ITSELF THE BELIZE LIBERATION ORGANISATION HAS THREATENED TO BURN DOWN THE WHOLE OF BELIZE CITY WHILE MINISTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES HAVE BEEN THREATENED WITH ASSASSINATION. THE CIVIL SERVICE IS DISAFFECTED, AND A NATIONAL STRIKE HAS BEEN CALLED WHICH THREATENS TO BRING THE GOVERNMENT TO A HALT NEXT WEEK. A PERMANENT SECRETARY HAS OFFERED HIS RESIGNATION.

2. THE POLICE BELIEVE THAT MUCH OF THE TROUBLE CAN BE LAID AT THE DOOR OF THE OPPOSITION RADICAL YOUTH MOVEMENT, ENCOURAGED BY THE UDP ITSELF. A PROFESSIONAL TROUBLE-MAKER CALLED BULLER, ALIAS LUMUMBA, RECENTLY DEPORTED FROM GHANA FOR ALLEGEDLY HELPING TO ORGANISE A COUP THERE, IS ALSO THOUGHT TO BEAR MUCH OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONTINUING TENSION

THE POLICE ARE HAMPERED IN THEIR TASK BY A LACK OF MANPOWER AND EQUIPMENT, AN ACTIVE GROUP OF OPPOSITION LAWYERS, AND MAGISTRATES WHOSE SYMPATHIES LIE WITH THE OPPOSITION. SOME MINISTERS ARE UNDERSTANDABLY JITTERY BUT DO NOT HELP MATTERS BY CALLING FOR MORE FORCE AND MAKING IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS ON THE POLICE. FEARING ASSASSINATION, A NUMBER OF THEM HAVE SURROUNDED THEMSELVES WITH PRIVATE ARMIES OF THUGS.

3. THE CAUSE OF ALL THIS TENSION STEMS FROM THE OPPOSITION ATTITUDE TO THE AGREEMENT RECENTLY CONCLUDED WITH GUATEMALA. IT IS BEING DESCRIBED AS A SELL OUT. THE PARTY REJECT MINISTERIAL EXPLANATIONS AS MERE PROPAGANDA AND ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO OVERTURN IT AND STOP THE MOVE TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE. THEY HOPE TO CREATE A SITUATION IN WHICH THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE WOULD HAVE TO BE POSTPONED.

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4. THE STRENGTH OF FEELING IS UNDOUBTEDLY GREAT AND SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE THERE IS WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FOR THEIR VIEWS. PRICE IS SAYING THAT HE WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY IN PUSHING THROUGH HIS OWN CABINET MORE THAN THREE OR FOUR CLAUSES OF THE HEADS OF AGREEMENT. I HAVE HAD LONG DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PREMIER, LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION AND THE SECURITY FORCES. YESTERDAY I ASKED PRICE TO TRY AND DO MORE HIMSELF TO ALLAY THE FEARS OF THE PEOPLE - TO EXPLAIN THE AGREEMENT IN FULL AND THE SAFEGUARDS THERE ARE IN IT FOR BELIZEANS. TO BE FAIR I THINK HE IS DOING HIS BEST, AND EXPLANATORY STATEMENTS BY COURTENAY AND SHOMAN ARE BEING BROADCAST DAILY OVER THE RADIO. CHURCH LEADERS HAVE ADDED THEIR VOICE TO TE CALLS FOR AN END TO THE VIOLENCE. I MADE ARANDA AWARE THAT I WILL HOLD THE OPPOSITION RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY VIOLENCE THAT CAN BE LAID AT THE DOOR OF THE YOUTH WING.

5. THE POLICE ARE IN A DIFFICULT POSITION. ON THE ONE HAND, THEY ARE BEING URGED BY MINISTERS TO GET EVEN TOUGHER AND HAVE SUFFERED CRITICISMS BY THE DEPUTY PREMIER FOR NOT BEING SUFFICIENTLY ACTIVE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY HAVE COME IN FOR PUBLIC CRITICISM FOR USING UNNECESSARY FORCE AND ROUGH TACTICS. THE COMMISSIONER REACHED THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR LAST WEEK WHEN HE PUT IN HIS RESIGNATION. HE HAS BEEN WORKING ROUND THE CLOCK AND IS SUFFERING BADLY FROM ULCERS. FOR ALL HIS FAULTS, WILLOUGHBY IS AN EFFECTIVE COMMISSIONER AND, IN THIS SITUATION, PROBABLY IRREPLACEABLE. THERE IS NO-ONE BELOW HIM CAPABLE OF TAKING OVER IMMEDIATELY AND AN EXPATRIATE WOULD FIND THE TASK ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. I HAVE THEREFORE SPENT SOME TIME ASSURING WILLOUGHBY OF MY SUPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING WHILE REMOVING AS MANY AS POSSIBLE OF THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS THAT HAVE ARISEN BETWEEN HIMSELF AND MINISTERS AND THE DEFENCE FORCE. HE HAS I THINK BEEN ENCOURAGED TO CARRY ON FOR THE TIME BEING.

6. PROVIDED THINGS DO NOT GET WORSE, I AM CONFIDENT THAT, WITH THE BACKING OF THE DEFENCE FORCE AND THE PRESENCE OF THE GARRISON, THE POLICE SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONTAIN THE SITUATION UNTIL THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.

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