

*M. Wash* (33)  
*Mr Bougace*

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE MINISTER OF STATE, MR RIDLEY,  
 AND THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR, SIGNOR ROBERTO DUCCI, AT THE  
 FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE AT 4.25 PM ON TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER 1979

Those present:

Nicholas Ridley, MP  
 K D Temple  
 G S Cowling

Roberto Ducci

1. After an exchange of courtesies Signor Ducci said that the Italian Government was extremely interested in recent events in Central America and Latin America and prior to the visit to the UK next weekend of the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Signor Malfatti, the Italian Government would like to know our views on the current situation in Central America, Chile and Argentina.
2. Mr Ridley said that in Nicaragua we did not maintain a Mission and thus did not receive regular reports. He congratulated the Italians on keeping a Mission in Nicaragua throughout the recent disturbances. He thought the present Nicaraguan Junta contained elements ranging from Marxists to Christian Democrats. The Marxists might not in fact be either pro-Cuban or pro-Russian. On balance the Junta wanted to establish a moderate government but it was evident that other elements wanted a stronger left-wing bias. A truce existed between all factions to enable the problem of rehabilitating the country to be undertaken first. Possibly the Communist elements were willing to agree to this in order to get as much Western aid as possible. While all could go smoothly for the next 6-10 months, internal problems could develop after that. Signor Ducci agreed. Nicaragua first needed to reconstruct its country. It had no time to export its revolution. Mr Ridley thought that could well be the view of the government, but not necessarily of individual soldiers in the Sandinista army. Tremendous experience in guerrilla warfare had been built-up and many individuals wished to continue fighting on behalf of the depressed groups in neighbouring countries. He knew for example that Argentina was concerned that left-wing extremists who had gone to fight in Nicaragua, would return to Argentina with new experience and resume their terrorist campaign with increased zeal. As far as the rest of Central America was concerned, the next countries likely to be affected by events were: El Salvador, Guatemala and (possibly) Honduras in that order. These were extremely offensive regimes. The US had now learned that by giving them support they brought far more problems from a human rights point of view than the stability they brought to the area. Venezuela and Colombia would certainly not object to their overthrow. Signor Ducci agreed that the Americans had learned from their experience in Nicaragua and were encouraging the bourgeoisie in El Salvador to detach themselves from President Romero and undertake liberal reforms. But it was likely that these reforms were now too late.

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3. In answer to a point raised by Mr Ridley, Signor Ducci felt that the EEC was approaching the matter of discussing Latin America completely wrongly by trying to discuss in the Political Cooperation framework the whole of Latin America at once. There was little point raising Central America with the EEC. Mr Ridley said that while he was in Panama for the Canal handover ceremony, he met Mrs Violeta de Chamorro, a member of the Nicaraguan Junta, who told him she would shortly be visiting Rome and would be prepared to visit London if invited. We planned to write to her and confirm this, but it might be an idea to ensure that she visited the EEC. Signor Ducci knew nothing of Sra de Chamorro's visit to Rome and said that it was difficult for the EEC to give aid on political grounds, because the EEC itself did not have a foreign policy. Mr Ridley said the EEC need not confine itself to discussing aid but use the opportunity to show that it supported the new Nicaraguan Government politically. Signor Ducci said his Minister would be extremely interested in this.
4. Turning to Chile, Mr Ridley said that only Belgium, Italy and the United Kingdom did not have Ambassadors in Santiago. The Belgian Ambassador in London suggested that they might consider sending an Ambassador if we did. We should have an Ambassador there, not because we approved of the regime but because we saw no point in making an exception. In fact, (speaking confidentially) it was only a matter of time before an announcement was made, this depending on when the Letellier case was resolved between Chile and the United States. Signor Ducci said that there was strong opposition in Italy against exchanging Ambassadors. Allende was almost a legend among the left-wing. But it would be pointless for the Italians to be the odd man out in Europe if Belgium and the United Kingdom exchanged Ambassadors with Chile in the near future, and he would discuss the matter with his minister.
5. Concerning Argentina, Mr Ridley said that the Falkland Islands dispute was at the stage where the Argentine Government were expecting us to negotiate, and for the present they were being extremely charming to us. However, the basic fact remained that the population of the Falkland Islands was British and wish to remain so. It had been announced by Argentina and the UK in July that Ambassadors would be exchanged, but so far agreement for candidates had not yet been sought by either country. Signor Ducci thanked Mr Ridley for the information he had given and said that he would discuss the issues with his minister when he arrived next week.
6. The meeting finished at 4.55 pm.

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