



WRJ 026/6.

- 9 DEC 1980

Visit of the Prime Minister
 the Rt. Honble. Mrs Thatcher MP ✓ 86
 to His Holiness Pope John Paul II
 on 24 November 1980

Summary

1. Accompanied by Sir M Palliser, and others, Mrs Thatcher visited the Vatican on 24 November. She arrived in Rome the day before for talks with the Italian authorities. The Vatican were flexible in arranging the visit. (Paragraphs 1 - 2).
2. On arrival Mrs Thatcher and her party were conducted to the apartment of the Cardinal Secretary of State, with whom she reviewed the international scene and discussed Northern Ireland. (Paragraphs 3 - 4).
3. Mrs Thatcher was received by the Pope at 10.30 am. Their talk lasted longer than expected. The visit was welcomed by the Vatican and came at an opportune moment. (Paragraphs 5 - 6).



BRITISH LEGATION
TO THE HOLY SEE.
ROME.

(353/2)

2 December 1980

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Carrington KCMG MC
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1

My Lord

The Prime Minister's Visit to the Pope

1. Accompanied by the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Sir Michael Palliser, Mr Michael Franklin, her Assistant Private Secretary, Mr Alexander, myself and others, the Prime Minister paid an informal visit to the Vatican on Monday the 24th of November. The purpose of the visit was to call on His Holiness Pope John Paul II. This was arranged for 10.30 am and took place without advisers present.

2. Mrs Thatcher arrived in Rome on Sunday the 23rd of November for talks with the Italian authorities: plans had been made for her to call on the Pope the following afternoon. The Vatican welcomed the prospect of Mrs Thatcher's visit and the Secretariat went out of their way to enable it to take place despite the limited time available. When it became clear that the Prime Minister would have to be back in England earlier than planned, in order to attend that day's debate, the Vatican proved ready and willing to readjust the programme

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so that the Prime Minister would still have the opportunity of a private talk with the Pope.

3. The Prime Minister and her party left the Quirinal for the Vatican at 09.40 am on the 24th of November. Their arrival in the courtyard of San Damaso was marked by the presence of the Swiss Guard, drawn up in the Prime Minister's honour. The party descended from their cars and, accompanied by a Gentleman of His Holiness, proceeded to the first floor of the Secretariat building to call on the Cardinal Secretary of State. It was arranged that this call should, exceptionally, take place before the call on the Pope himself since the latter never receives visitors before 10.30 am and time was at a premium.

4. As reported in my telegram No. 46, the main subjects covered in the talk with Cardinal Casaroli were Northern Ireland; the role of the Community; developments at Madrid on the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the problem of securing freedom of religion. There was a brief discussion about the qualities of Governor Reagan and about the problems of the Middle East. Cardinal Casaroli said that the balance of terror between the United States and the USSR at least ensured some degree of detente and that this was better than none.

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5. After the call on the Secretary of State the party proceeded to the second floor where Mrs Thatcher was shown into the Pope's Private Library at 10.30 am. The Secretariat expected that the private talk with the Pope would last some twenty minutes. In fact it was nearer forty-five. After members of her party had been received, the Prime Minister was conducted to the main entrance on the courtyard of San Damaso, where the Swiss Guard presented arms as the Prime Minister left.

6. Although the visit was a brief and informal one, it was clearly welcome to the Vatican. The Pope's message to Mrs Thatcher of the 29th of October is evidence of the pressures on the Vatican as a result of the behaviour of the hunger strikers at the Maze prison. The fact that the Prime Minister has been able to discuss this and related matters privately and at length with the Pope will counter this pressure.

I am sending a copy of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Quirinal.

I am, my Lord
Yours faithfully

Mark Heath

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH



18 December 1980

Sir Mark Heath KCVO CMG
HOLY SEE

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Dear Mark

BRITISH DELEGATION HOLY SEE

1. Thank you for your Despatch on the visit of the Prime Minister to the Pope on 24 November, which we have circulated to those interested.
2. As you point out, the talks will have been valuable in helping to counter pressure on the Vatican over the hunger strike at the Maze Prison as it reaches a critical stage.

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LAST PAPER

Yours ever

Dant

D A S Gladstone
Western European Department

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