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From the Private Secretary

3 November 1988

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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH CARDINAL GLEMP

The Prime Minister had a talk on the first evening of her visit to Poland with Cardinal Glemp at the Archbishop's Palace in Warsaw. Cardinal Glemp was accompanied by Bishop Dabrowski. H.M. Ambassador, Warsaw was also present.

The Prime Minister began by saying that Poland was very special, it could not be compared to any other country. She was very pleased to be paying a visit and would welcome the Cardinal's advice on how she should deal with the very tricky issues posed by the present situation in Poland. Cardinal Glemp referred to the very warm feelings in Poland towards Britain. There were many Polish families living there as well as memories of the War. After the War, the Church in Poland had been forced to come to terms with a different reality, that of Communism. The Church did not belong to any political group. It had to support the interests of the entire Polish nation. Its most important task was to cultivate moral attitudes, particularly a sense of good and evil. The Communist system had done much damage in this respect. It had torn down Christianity and put nothing in its place. It was left to the Church to preserve and develop fundamental values such as respect for human dignity.

The Prime Minister said that she understood the very important role played by the Church. She also appreciated that Poland had to sort out its own problems. The main problem seemed to her the absence of any mechanism through which to do so. The crucial difference between the western democracies and Communist systems was the absence of any act of political consent in the latter. Although Solidarity was referred to as a trade union, its main function was in fact to express different political views to those of the Government because no other channels for this existed. Cardinal Glemp agreed that it was important to sort out what Solidarity stood for. He believed that its aspirations were positive and in "this evil system" they strove for good. Certainly they were more than just a trade union. Unfortunately they were also full of people who pursued their own private goals. There were great difficulties in the way of dialogue between them and the Government. But he hoped that reason would prevail.

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The Prime Minister said that she realised she was treading on eggshells by paying her visit to Poland at such a difficult time. There was no way she could let down the hopes of people who wanted greater freedom and human rights. Equally there was no way she could interfere in Poland's internal affairs. All she could do was draw on our own experience in Britain and on the Christian faith. Clearly, there was a very deep wish among people in Poland to have a bigger say in how their lives were run, with more freedom of expression. She hoped that by seeing Solidarity she would at least encourage them not to lose heart. At the same time, she could understand their pessimism: it was hard to detect a real will on the part of the Polish Government to find a way through in the proposed Round Table discussions.

Cardinal Glemp said that these were indeed very difficult and complex problems. In the situation which the Prime Minister described, the Church was an independent force. It sought to diminish emotions and tensions. Sometimes it sympathised with one side, sometimes with the other. It remained neutral in the sense of not engaging in political struggle. But in his personal view, there were good prospects for achieving some progress in the present situation. He believed the Prime Minister's visit could be very helpful in this respect. It would encourage those who believed in freedom and it would help the Polish Government over its sense of isolation. He believed the Polish people would respond well to the sign of friendship which the Prime Minister's visit represented.

The Prime Minister said she well understood the sensitivity of the situation. The message which she would seek to convey was that you could not have successful economic change without giving people more personal liberty. Cardinal Glemp said there had been some progress both in the direction of more personal freedom and more economic freedom. But Poland had to learn how to proceed democratically. Extremists on both sides did not want this. Nonetheless he hoped for developments in a positive direction. The risk he saw in the present situation was that a Round Table dialogue could divide the opposition, with some accusing others and collaborating with the Government or becoming its instrument. It would be wrong to be entirely cynical about the Polish Government or believe that it could not genuinely work for the good of the nation. The Prime Minister said she remained convinced that the nub of the problem was the lack of any mechanism for real debate or transfer of power by democratic means. Cardinal Glemp interjected that the Prime Minister was absolutely right. The Prime Minister continued that this meant that it was very difficult to get from the present system to something better, and comparatively little that any outside country could do to help. We could offer practical assistance such as management training and greater exchanges between teachers and students. Once there had been successful economic and political reform, the West would be ready to provide financial help. But her greatest concern of all remained to show that we were not letting down people who had fought courageously for freedom under very difficult conditions. She would try to steer her way through these conflicting demands.

The meeting ended with some discussion of Cardinal Glemp's forthcoming visit to Australia and New Zealand. The Prime Minister referred to the advice she had received from the Pope before visiting Poland for which she was very grateful.

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I am copying this letter to Alex Allan (H.M. Treasury),  
Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet  
Office).

C.D. POWELL

Lyn Parker, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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MR. POWELL

I wondered if the Prime Minister would send a letter on the lines of the attached to those opposition figures whom she met at the Residence this afternoon. This would be a nice gesture given that the meeting was broken off rather abruptly.

We could of course also send letters to the independents whom she met yesterday.

NIGEL THORPE

3 November 1988