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AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE

HOLY SEE

20/54-G - CONFIDENTIAL

25th April, 1977

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin

1. I received on the morning of the 25th April a telephone call at 9.30 a.m. from the Secretariat of State asking me to call at 12.30 p.m. on the Sostituto. I had no way of knowing why I was being brought in so exceptionally and the only conclusion was that it had to do with an Irish question.
2. I duly attended at the Secretariat of State and met the Sostituto who presented me with the enclosed note (Appunto). Having read it, I put it back on the table in front of him and told him frankly that "I was not happy with it". By putting it back on the table I meant to indicate in terms of traditional diplomacy that I might not accept it.
3. The Sostituto then went into a long explanation of why I had been brought in, what the note amounted to and the fact that they felt that because of messages which the Holy Father was receiving the matter had to be brought to our attention. But the Holy Father was acting entirely in his pastoral capacity.
4. I asked the Sostituto was I to take it that the Secretariat ^{the} was making an intervention in regard to/hunger strikers. He was not too explicit on this and then I told him that the hunger strike was over. He challenged me on this saying that the hunger strike was over in Portlaoise but not in the Curragh. I told him

that the hunger strikers had been removed to the Curragh Hospital and that it was over.

5. The Sostituto explained that they were receiving messages about the conditions in Portlaoise and that they felt obliged to bring this to our attention and the Appunto was referred to again as it lay on the table. At this time my impression was that the Sostituto was beginning to worry about my question as to whether the note was an intervention. He disclaimed any such intention and asserted that the Holy See was entirely confident that the Government of Ireland would understand the reason why the matter was being raised.

6. I brought the Sostituto back again to the matter of intervention from which he was by now backing off. Having disposed of "intervention" he explained that the Holy See's position might be described as "intéressée". I asked him if he meant by this that there was an "interest". He agreed with this but I think in fairness he did not comprehend what I was driving at.

** II **

7. I turned the conversation into more practical terms at this point and I asked him three questions:

- i) how many messages/letters had they received;
- ii) where had they come from;
- iii) had they been mostly from Northern Ireland.

I had explained to him that I might not have the right to ask him these questions but that my Government would probably feel

that I should know. He told me that the number of messages/letters had been between 20 and 25; that they were mostly from religious; and that the majority were from the South.

** III **

8. Turning to the material in the note I did point out the reasons for the alleged severe searching and told him that explosives had been smuggled into the prison at Portlaoise some time back which permitted the escape of several dangerous prisoners and caused severe damage. I told him that only last week (the 18th April) the Taoiseach had said in the firmest terms that there would be no enquiry into the conditions at Portlaoise and that the Government would not allow it.

The Sostituto seemed to pull himself^{up}/but almost imperceptibly when I told him that the Taoiseach had said that there would be no enquiry; he again went into a most meticulous explanation of what they were doing - and again I began to detect that he was pulling back. The Sostituto said that they were not questioning for one moment the way in which the Irish Government was handling things; that only the Government could make a proper judgment of the situation and that they were entirely satisfied to abide by this judgment. The Sostituto at this point seemed particularly intent on removing even the slightest inference that the Holy See was intruding into the Government's sphere of responsibility, and he again emphasized in very clear terms the Holy See's acceptance that the Government of Ireland, and that Government alone, was competent to assess the situation and to take the necessary measures.

** IV **

9. Since I had by now felt I was coming to grips with the Sostituto, I asked him whether any publicity would be given to the fact that I was called in. He said no. I told him that if the Vatican allowed itself to be involved in this way with the prisoners in Portlaoise, the Government of Ireland would take a serious view of the matter. I told him that the Taoiseach was a man utterly dedicated to the maintenance of law and order.

10. I had the feeling at this point that the Sostituto (that is, with reference to our Government taking a serious view) was becoming rather nervous and he then, I thought, changed his tactics. He said quite amiably that he knew of course that I would not send the Appunto to Dublin because "it might somehow be released". I said to him "What is it for then?" He said "It is for you alone and for the Embassy". I was convinced he changed his line at this point; that, when the interview started, he had assumed that the Appunto would go to Dublin and that the interview would have been reduced to my conducting a defence of my Government's policy towards the prisoners. A copy of the Appunto I am, of course, forwarding - with a translation - so that the Department may examine its terms for itself.

11. I asked the Sostituto what they were going to say to the people who had written to them about this question. I asked him whether they were going to say that they had had the Irish Ambassador in and had spoken to him about it. He said no. I asked him what were they then going to send to these people. He said "We are going to say nothing at all".

** V **

12. In regard to my suspicion mentioned above that the Bostituto in the course of the interview realised that it was possibly going wrong from their viewpoint, I must record that I felt the change in the atmosphere again when I stood up to leave. I mentioned some luncheon engagements which I had next week about which I wanted to get a reaction from him. He brushed this off and returned to the subject as he opened the door: "Try to remember that we get these letters all the time from people all over the world and that the Holy Father is only acting in a pastoral sense in regard to these things". He listed Heads of State about whom they are getting letters of complaint and he mentioned the Shah of Iran. Finally he said that it might perhaps be best if I wrote a note myself to Dublin confining it simply to the fact that the Holy See has been receiving these letters and they felt under a responsibility to bring their receipt to our notice but on humanitarian grounds only: I said I would do that. There was no further reference to his Appunto.

I enclose a copy of this Report for the Taciseach's Department.

Ambassador.

A P P U N T O

The attention of the Secretariat of State has been drawn to the hunger strike begun on 7th March by about twenty political prisoners in the Prison of Portlaoise and of the Curragh.

This strike appears to have been officially called in order to obtain more humane treatment in this (sic) penal institution where 120 political prisoners are seemingly being subjected to extremely severe measures.

Following requests from several quarters, the Holy See appeals to the Government of Ireland to express to it its concern for the lives of the prisoners who have been on hunger strike for some time now and is confident that suitable measures will be taken to mitigate the treatment which appears to be reserved for these prisoners, above all as regards contacts between them and their families.

In making this démarche, the Holy See declares that it is acting entirely on humanitarian grounds.