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CODED MESSAGE	
IMMEDIATE	URGENT
26/8/79	1730
DATE	<i>Handwritten signature</i>
INITIALS	

C174

TO HQ FROM LONDON
FOR A/SECRETARY NELIGAN FROM AMBASSADOR

MMNEOXJ

I MADE A COURTESY CALL TODAY ON MICHAEL ALISON MP, THE MINISTER OF STATE AND DEPUTY TO HUMPHREY ATKINS IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE. THE LATTER IS DUE BACK IN THE OFFICE AFTER HIS HOLIDAY IN TUNISIA NEXT MONDAY AND THEN ALISON GOES ON LEAVE. I FELT THIS WAS AN APPROPRIATE MOMENT TO GET TO KNOW HIM BETTER AND I SHALL FOLLOW IT UP BY CALLS ON HUGH ROSSI, PHILIP GOODHART, GILES SHAW AND LORD ELTON WHEN THEY RETURN TO LONDON FROM LEAVE.

OUR CONVERSATION WAS UNSTRUCTURED BUT TWO THEMES PREDOMINATED: (A) THE PAPAL VISIT AND (B) THE CAREY INITIATIVE.

ON (A) ALISON TOOK A CLEVER LINE WHICH WAS NEW TO ME ALTHOUGH YOU MAY WELL HAVE GOT IT ALREADY THROUGH OUR EMBASSY AT THE HOLY SEE FROM THE BRITISH THERE. THE LINE IS THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WOULD BE GLAD TO COOPERATE SHOULD THE POPE WISH TO VISIT NORTHERN IRELAND AS MRS THATCHER HAS SAID BUT THAT THEY HOPE HE WOULD NOT GO THERE BY THE "BACKDOOR". THAT IS TO SAY THEY HOPE HE WOULD COME TO THE UK ON AN OFFICIAL VISIT, MEET THE QUEEN IN LONDON, JOURNEY TO, SAY, LIVERPOOL AND OTHER CENTRES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THEN IF HE WISHED GO TO ARMAGH.

ON THE OTHER HAND IF THE POPE WERE TO GO TO ARMAGH AND OTHER CENTRES FROM THE REPUBLIC NOW IT COULD BE THE CAUSE OF VIOLENCE AND BITTERNESS WHICH MIGHT SETBACK THE HOPES OF RECONCILIATION AND PROGRESS.

ALL VERY CLEVER. I SAID THAT IT SEEMED UNLIKELY TO ME THAT SUCH AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE UK COULD TAKE SHAPE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE AND THAT THE FORTHCOMING VISIT OF THE POPE TO IRELAND MAY WELL BE THE ONLY CHANCE WE SHALL EVER HAVE. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THE POPE NOT TO FEEL HE COULD VISIT THE HISTORIC PRIMATEAL SEE OF ST. PATRICK COULD ONLY CAUSE RESENTMENT NOT ONLY IN IRELAND BUT IN EUROPE, THE USA AND INDEED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. TO THIS MR. ALISON SAID THAT MRS THATCHER HAD MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THE POPE WOULD BE WELCOME TO VISIT THE U.K. IF HE SO WISHED AT THIS TIME AND I SAID WE HAD NOTED THIS WITH ENCOURAGEMENT.

I MADE THE TRANSITION TO (B) BY EXPRESSING THE HOPE THAT WHATEVER HAPPENED OR WAS SAID IN THE NORTH DURING THE PAPAL VISIT WOULD NOT MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR OUR FRIENDS IN THE U.S. TO WITHSTAND THE PRESSURES FROM THE PIRA AND THEIR ALLIES IN THE U.S. I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY OF REFERRING TO CAREY'S SPEECH IN DUBLIN IN 1977 AND OF EMPHASING THE POSITIVE ROLE OF THE QUARTET IN SEEKING A PEACEFUL POLITICAL INITIATIVE. ALISON SAID HE APPRECIATED THIS AS DID HUMPHREY ATKINS AND HOPED THAT DUBLIN AND LONDON COULD COORDINATE THEIR POSITIONS IN THINKING OUT HOW BEST TO HANDLE THE CAREY INITIATIVE. THEY HAD ALREADY RECEIVED AN OFFICIAL LETTER FROM CAREY AND ATKINS WAS WILLING TO TALK WITH CAREY AND THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE QUARTET IN THE U.S. I SAID THAT WHILE CONSULTATION WOULD BE DESIRABLE THERE COULD OF COURSE BE NO QUESTION OF A COORDINATED RESPONSE AND THIS WAS READILY AGREED. I WAS NOT SURPRISED BY THE ABSENCE OF ANY REFERENCE TO LORD CARRINGTON. OUR CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE, AFTER ALL, IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE AND THEY WOULD PROBABLY NOT WISH TO SEE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS ISSUE PASSING TO THE FOREIGN OFFICE. ALISON SAID HE KNEW THAT ALKINS LOOKED FORWARD TO TALKING THIS ISSUE OVER WITH OUR MINISTER.

THE ATMOSPHERE WAS FRIENDLY AND CONSTRUCTIVE THROUGHOUT AND ALISON EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT HIS DUTIES WOULD BRING HIM TO DUBLIN WHICH HE HAS NEVER VISITED. HE IS AS DIFFERENT FROM CONCANNON AS ATKINS IS FROM MASON.