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21 March 1986

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Bishop Edward Daly and Irish prisoners in Britain

Dear Assistant Secretary

You will remember that at the Mass in Westminster Cathedral on Sunday last, 16 March, organised by the Council of Irish Counties which you and the Minister attended, Bishop Edward Daly in his sermon made some fairly strong references to the Annie Maguire Case and the Birmingham Six. This was of course in the context of a sermon which very strongly condemned violence.

The Bishop's sermon was strongly applauded by the very large congregation and he was received most warmly by the congregation in the procession down the aisle after Mass.

At our lunch in the Embassy on the following day, 17 March, which you also attended, Bishop Daly told me that this was the first time he had preached in Westminster Cathedral and he had been rather apprehensive about it. He had hesitated about mentioning the prisoners but had thought it right to do so. He had not expected to be applauded by the congregation - and Canon Kelly, the Administrator of the Cathedral, in a separate conversation, told me that this was the first time he had heard applause of this kind for a sermon.

Bishop Daly also told me that he had that morning (ie Monday, 17 March) visited the two Irish girls who are on remand here since July (*O'Byrne and Anderson*) and whose complaints of harassment through strip searching have been a focus of some public controversy. As you will be aware from reports from Miss O'Hanrahan they have so far, notwithstanding their complaints, refused to accept a visit from an Embassy official.

Bishop Daly said that from his talk with them he does believe that they are being treated rather harshly. They do have Provo affiliations - particularly Martina Anderson who told him frankly "I'm no saint". But he also, notwithstanding this, lends some credence to their claims that they are innocent of the present charges. He said that he had strongly advised the two women that they should be willing to accept a visit from the Embassy and he seemed to think that this might well come about.

As you will remember when the Bishop left the Embassy after lunch he was going direct to Euston on his way to Birmingham to visit some of those imprisoned for the Birmingham bombing. I gather that it is his general practice when he can to visit Irish prisoners in this country. Like

others who know of the case he seemed to be completely convinced of their innocence. He repeated to me a point which had been made previously to him by one of them (Walker?). This was that the pubs where the bombs had been planted were well known to be frequented by Irish people in Birmingham. For this reason it could be seen to have been unlikely that the bombs were planted by people from the Birmingham area (such as the Birmingham Six) - since such people would not select as targets pubs frequented by Irish people.

Yours sincerely



Noel Dorr
Ambassador

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Assistant Secretary
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* (ie the Birmingham Six.)