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Canada


FM OTTAWA 162155Z JUN 81
TO PRIORITY FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 283 OF 16 JUNE

MEETING WITH MR TRUDEAU

1. MR TRUDEAU RECEIVED ME THIS AFTERNOON, LESS THAN 24 HOURS AFTER MY ARRIVAL IN OTTAWA AND I HANDED OVER THE PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER OF INTRODUCTION. OFFICIALS WERE PRESENT. HE WAS VERY FRIENDLY. I FOUND HIM A GOOD DEAL BETTER TO MEET THAN TO READ ABOUT.

2. I SAID THAT I DID NOT WANT TO BOTHER HIM IN THE FUTURE UNLESS I HAD REAL PROBLEMS TO DISCUSS BUT IF I DID, AND NOT MERELY ON THE CONSTITUTION, I HOPED I MIGHT BE ABLE TO SEE HIM. HE SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THIS WAS ENTIRELY REASONABLE. I SAID THAT PERHAPS WE MIGHT MEET QUITE INFORMALLY OVER LUNCH ON OCCASION. HE COULD NOT REMEMBER OFFHAND WHEN HE HAD LAST LUNCHEDED AT THE HIGH COMMISSION BUT WENT ON TO SAY, AS I HOPED HE WOULD, THAT IN THIS RESPECT HE THOUGHT THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER AND THE AMERICAN AND FRENCH AMBASSADORS SHOULD BE IN A SPECIAL POSITION.

3. IN HIS ONLY MENTION OF THE EVENTS OF FEBRUARY HE SAID THAT HE HAD ALWAYS GOT ON WELL WITH MY PREDECESSOR, THOUGH HE THOUGHT THAT SIR JOHN FORD HAD NOT ALWAYS APPROVED OF HIS POLICIES. BUT HE SAID HE WAS NOT A MAN TO HARBOUR GRUDGES. I SAID THAT I THOUGHT THAT WAS NOW ALL WATER OVER THE DAM.

4. MR TRUDEAU SPOKE MAINLY ABOUT THE CONSTITUTION. HE DID NOT KNOW HOW OR WHEN THE COURT WOULD DECIDE, BUT HOPED FOR AN EARLY DECISION. IN THAT EVENT HE HOPED THAT WE WOULD BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE MATTER WITH REASONABLE DESPATCH. NOW THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAD SUBMITTED ITS CASE TO THE COURT, HE THOUGHT THAT A FAVOURABLE RULING SHOULD HAVE A CORRESPONDINGLY POSITIVE EFFECT IN WESTMINSTER. HE REPEATED THE POINT WHICH HE HAS MADE SEVERAL TIMES IN PUBLIC THAT THE WHOLE ISSUE WOULD NOT GET ANY EASIER WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME. I ASSURED HIM THAT HMG WOULD DO THEIR BEST TO DEAL WITH THE MATTER AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE BUT SAID THAT ALTHOUGH A CLEAN-CUT DECISION IN FAVOUR OF THE FEDERAL GOVT. WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HELP, ALL WOULD STILL NOT BE ENTIRELY PLAIN SAILING AND THE RECESS WAS NOT ALL THAT FAR AWAY. MR TRUDEAU THEN DISARMINGLY ASKED WHAT TONE MRS THATCHER WOULD ADOPT WHEN SHE MET HIM "I IMAGINE SHE WON'T WANT TO HAVE AN ARGUMENT WITH ME". HE RECOGNISED THAT MR PYM HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT TO MEET THE 1 JULY DEADLINE THE RESOLUTION NEEDED TO BE WITH WESTMINSTER BY JANUARY OR FEBRUARY AT THE LATEST. IN VIEW OF THE LONG DELAY HE WONDERED WHETHER MRS THATCHER MIGHT BE SARCASTIC. I SAID THAT I WAS SURE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD WISH TO DEAL WITH THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF

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THE PROBLEM. MR TRUDEAU MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WAS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN OF A FAVOURABLE DECISION. HOWEVER, ASSUMING THAT IT WAS FAVOURABLE, HE THOUGHT IT INCONCEIVABLE TO HIM THAT THE BRITISH HOUSE OF COMMONS WOULD FAIL TO PASS A RESOLUTION PROPERLY PUT TO THEM. HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND THE KERSHAW COMMITTEE'S ATTITUDE. I POINTED OUT THAT SOME MPS WERE A LAW UNTO THEMSELVES AND REMINDED HIM OF THE AMOUNT OF LOBBYING WHICH HAD BEEN UNDERTAKEN BY THE PROVINCES. MR TRUDEAU WONDERED WHETHER PARLIAMENTARIANS HAD NOT BEEN TOLD OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT PASSING A RESOLUTION: IN HIS MIND THE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT DOING SO FAR OUTWEIGHED THOSE OF ACCEDING TO THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT REQUEST. IN THE LATTER CASE THERE WOULD BE GRUMB- LING BUT THIS WOULD SETTLE DOWN. ALTHOUGH PEOPLE LIKE THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION INDULGED IN RHETORIC TO THAT EFFECT, NOBODY REALLY BELIEVED THAT HE INTENDED TO SET UP A UNITARY STATE ON THE BASIS OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION. IF THE OPPONENTS OF HIS CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS SUCCEEDED WHAT WOULD THEIR VICTORY CRY BE? HE (TRUDEAU) WAS JUST WAITING TO MAKE A SPEECH IN WHICH HE WOULD CONGRATULATE HIS OPPONENTS FOR FAILING TO SUPPORT HIS PROPOSALS AND THEREBY ENSURING THAT MINORITY RIGHTS SUCH AS THOSE OF THE INDIANS AND THE FRENCH CANADIANS WERE NOT SAFEGUARDED. HE WAS SURE THAT THE SUPREME COURT WAS REFLECTING NOW ON THE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF AN ADVERSE DECISION IF THEY DECIDED THAT PROVINCIAL APPROVAL FOR SOME OF THE CHANGES WAS NEEDED HOW WOULD THEY DECIDE HOW MUCH CONSENT WAS REQUIRED - UNANIMITY OR A MAJORITY OR WHAT? THEY WOULD ALSO HAVE TO DECIDE ON AN AMENDING FORMULA. HE CONCLUDED BY SAYING "IT IS A GREAT FIGHT - SORRY YOU'RE ON THE RECEIVING END OF IT".

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