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CONFIDENTIAL

3rd June 1981

B/F with draft
reply

Mrs. Margaret Thatcher,
10, Downing Street,
London.

Dear Mrs. Thatcher,

Unknowingly I received an invitation to meet you at the lunch in Stormont Castle last week. Due to security reasons, I was not told that you would be there. I had some other commitments here on that day, so I did not accept the invitation to lunch with the Secretary of State at such short notice. Since then, there have been some allegations in the Guardian and Sunday Telegraph that I snubbed you. I wish you to know that that was not the case. In hindsight, I felt that the Secretary of State could have confided in me, especially at the present very critical time. As a Bishop, I have to respect many confidences, and I greatly resented the implication that I could not be trusted. Indeed, I have already respected many confidences placed in me by the Northern Ireland Office. I am afraid that the same cannot be said of the NIO as regards confidences which we shared about meetings and times of meeting which, on several occasions, were somewhat mysteriously leaked to the press in advance much to the embarrassment of Cardinal O'Fiaich and myself.

I have read the full text of your speech at the lunch in Stormont Castle. I agree with you when you state that the Provisional IRA have put the Catholic community on the rack. I say that as somebody who lives in one of the most troubled areas. I have spent many sleepless nights recently with petrol bombing and riots taking place around my house. I live in an area which, at the present time, is deprived of many amenities as a result of rioting and destruction. Several close friends have been murdered by the IRA. I have also had close friends murdered by the Security Forces. I have lived and worked here as priest and bishop for more than 19 difficult years. I abhor and detest violence and injustice of all kinds and have publicly stated my position on countless occasions and I have suffered many threats and intimidation as a result. I have publicly stated that I do not consider that a hunger strike can be morally justified in the present circumstances. I do not believe in political status, nor have I ever suggested that it should be introduced.

With Cardinal O'Fiaich, I was engaged in discussions with Mr. Humphrey Atkins for a period of seven or eight months last year. Those talks were designed to avoid the present dreadful situation. I believe that had our advice been accepted and responded to, the present situation and resultant polarisation would not have developed.

I believe that the IRA, loyalist paramilitary groups, murder and bombing, hunger strikes and all the abhorrent phenomena in this community stem from a fundamental political problem. I believe that if the political problem is confronted, the symptoms of this problem will no longer exist. The violence etc, are symptoms of the problem rather than the problem itself. I think you are already aware of this. And I appreciate that the political problem is difficult and extremely complex and will not be solved in the short term.. However, I believe that, with more sensitive handling, some of the symptoms can be alleviated.

The most immediate problem just now is the hunger strike and all the community unrest that has been generated by it. Hunger strikes in Ireland have historically unleashed a dreadful backlash in the community. For somebody who is not Irish, this may be very difficult to understand. I do believe very sincerely, with respect, that your Government must try to be more sensitive to the community which is being torn apart by the hunger strike. There is a battle for hearts and minds going on within the Catholic community here. I have spent the last seven years as a Catholic Bishop here. During those years, the whole thrust of my pastoral work has been trying to alienate young people from the IRA, pointing out the incompatibility of membership of such an organisation with christian living. Up until the autumn of last year, I had been making considerable headway. Violence was reduced to a very low level once again in this city. IRA activity was minimal. The Catholic community and especially the young had disowned them. Prison protest marches were attracting little local support. The situation has now changed utterly. I have experienced great hostility from young people once again. There is wholesale intimidation going on, and whilst there is a containment policy that may be working fairly well, it is making life almost intolerable for those within the containment areas. I do think that if your Government could see it's way to implement some changes in the prison regime applying to all prisoners here, short of granting political status, it would receive a positive response from this community. I am convinced of this. The Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, a very esteemed Commission of the Irish Catholic Church, yesterday submitted a document to Mr. Atkins making some concrete suggestions on these lines. I would plead with you to give careful attention to this document. I believe that we simply cannot afford to let this situation drift any longer. If it is allowed to drift, this whole area will slip into anarchy with disastrous consequences for everyone. As you likely know, all kinds of undesirable local and foreign influences are busily operating here peddling philosophies which are

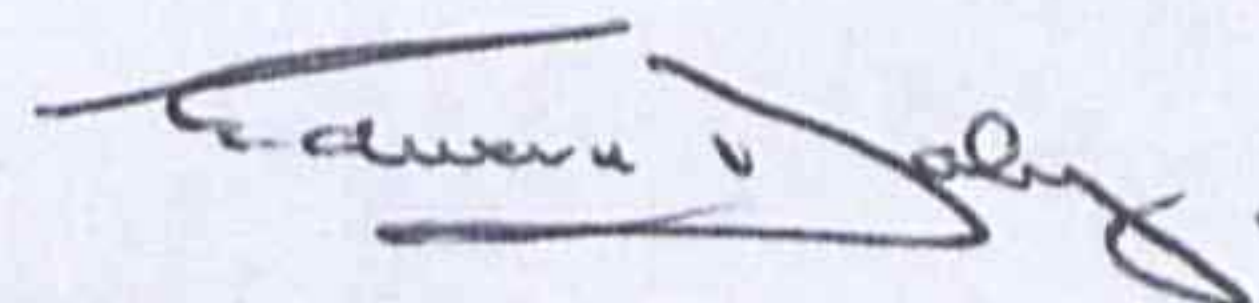
completely alien to us. I have a great love and affection for the people here. They are very good and kind people. They have suffered terribly. We have one of the highest levels of unemployment in Western Europe. Yet, before these troubles began, this community was completely law-abiding. I believe that if urgent action is taken, we can still salvage the situation. Thus I would plead with you to give your most careful consideration to this. Whatever the reaction of the prisoners might be, or whatever the reaction of their organisations outside may be, the Catholic community here, I am convinced, would respond positively to an acceptance of the suggestions made by the Justice and Peace Commission.

I am writing this letter to you in confidence. This letter will not be published by me. I hope that you will see your way to respond positively to it. I can assure you that a positive response will evoke unanimous and energetic support from myself and the other Catholic Bishops here, and from the great majority of the Catholic community throughout Ireland. I do not think that it will evoke a wholly negative reaction from the Protestant community here, apart from some predictable objections from some predictable quarters. They are as anxious as anyone here to see an end to this problem.

I look forward to hearing from you at your early convenience.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

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+ Edward Daly
Bishop of Derry