

Italy.

SUBJECT.



see Master sub.

*Ireland: H-block Hunger Strike
Nov 79*

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 November, 1980.

*Subsequent correspondence on
Ireland, Nov 79, H-Block Hunger Strike.*

Prime Minister's Visit to Rome: Northern Ireland

During his talk with the Prime Minister at the Vatican this morning, Cardinal Casaroli raised the question of Northern Ireland. He said that he had received some new information this morning of which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would already be aware. This new information seemed to hold the prospect of some progress in the situation, although "an effort of imagination" would be required from HMG.

At Cardinal Casaroli's request, Monsignor Silvestrini explained that they had had a message which originated with the Chaplain of the Maze Prison, and which indicated that the prisoners on hunger strike were ready to propose a solution to the present impasse. There would of course have to be a compromise. But the hunger strikers were ready to give up the strike if their new demands were met. Monsignor Silvestrini said that he understood that the priest in question had been invited to London for a meeting with a senior Government official tomorrow, Tuesday, 25 November.

The Prime Minister said that of course she hoped a solution could be found. No good could come if the strike were pursued to the bitter end. Everyone, both inside the Maze and outside, would be harmed. Cardinal Casaroli agreed, but said that it was not always easy to strike a balance in these matters. He was conscious of the problems with public opinion to which the hunger strike was giving rise. The stress in the present situation was very great.

Cardinal Casaroli ended this part of the discussion by expressing gratitude for the tone of the Prime Minister's reply to the Pope's recent message about the situation.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Paul Lever (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

Roy Harrington, Esq.,
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