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5 December 1989

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Attention: Mr. Michael Collins

Prison Visit to Paddy Hill, Birmingham Six

BMP Gartree, 30 November 1989

Together with Mr. Murray I visited Paddy Hill of the Birmingham Six on Thursday, 30 November 1989. You will have seen our telex C305 of 30 November 1989 on this visit which lasted just under two hours.

Release of Guildford Four

Paddy Hill said that he was delighted that the outcome of the Court of Appeal hearing had seen the release of the Guildford Four. He had become very close to Gerry Conlon in particular during their years together in Gartree and said he thought of him as a son. It was explained to Hill that the Embassy in London had had extensive contacts with Gerry Conlon since his release, had issued him with an Irish passport and had been instrumental in his obtaining a visa for the United States. The Embassy had, through the Department in Dublin and the Embassy in Washington, also been involved in arranging the appointments with Irish American politicians in the States. Hill was delighted to see the exposure that Gerry Conlon was getting for the case of the Birmingham Six in the States. He expressed interest in the refusal of the British authorities to allow Congressman Joe Kennedy to visit the Birmingham Six and claimed the British were now "afraid" of the publicity that will be generated as their cause is taken up by Congressman Kennedy and other high profile figures. He is looking forward with interest to the presentation by Kadar Asmal to the UN in New York early next year on their case. He repeated the claim he made on the last visit that Britain was very uneasy about cases like theirs being referred to in international fora.

Letter to the Taoiseach

Hill did not raise his letter to the Taoiseach sent earlier this year regarding the petition of the Birmingham Six to the European Commission of Human rights in Strasbourg. Nor did he raise the question of our initiating proceedings under the European Convention on Human Rights

which he had also proposed. He had been very critical of a perceived lack of Government support for their submission to Strasbourg during the last Embassy visit on 9 October, prior to the release of the Guildford Four. He was very interested to receive the texts of the Taoiseach's speech during the debate in Dail Eireann on Anglo-Irish relations on 23 November 1989 and also the Minister's speech on 24 November 1989 which we gave him. We went through both speeches with him and drew his attention to the very strong line being taken by the Government on their case. We also discussed the Resolution of the European Parliament with him and highlighted the fact that the adoption of this Resolution had been welcomed by the Minister and in particular the Parliament's call for a "thorough review" of their case. Mr. Hill said he would study these texts with great interest.

Notification of visit by prison authorities

Mr. Hill arrived for the visit in a state of some agitation as he had been only notified by the prison authorities of the visit after we had arrived at the prison. The arrangements had been made with the security side of the prison in the usual way and they had undertaken to inform Mr. Hill of our intention to visit him and to give him the opportunity to indicate if our proposed visit would be convenient for him. I sent for the prison's No. 1 Governor who arrived together with his Head of Security. When the situation had been explained to them they admitted the prison authorities had failed to notify Mr. Hill of the proposed visit and the Governor expressed his apologies to the Embassy and to Mr. Hill. His indignation had been fuelled by having spent 3 days up to Wednesday, 29th "on the block" (in solitary confinement) for having £20 and a gas lighter on his person. He had been given a further 14 days for refusing an order but that had been dropped. Indeed the Head of Security told us that he had spent 2 hours on the Wednesday, "begging Paddy to come off the block". This may have been related to our visit on the next day. When the notification question was resolved to our satisfaction the prison officials left.

New evidence

He was hopeful that new evidence would emerge through the sustained pressure on the police, forcing some officers involved to come forward. He had seen the Sunday Correspondent article of 19 November referring to statements, by a former inspector (Brown) and a former sergeant (Buckley), both of Lancashire police, which contradicted evidence given by the West Midlands police as to the times of the interrogations of five of the men at Morecambe police station on the night they were arrested. You will have seen Mr. Murray's telex of above reference on this point. The question of the exact times of the interrogations was also referred to at length in my report of 14 November 1989 on the visit to Billy Power and Dick McIlkenny. You will recall that the false statements by the Surrey police regarding the timing of interviews with the Guildford Four was referred to at length by Counsel for the Crown when he told the Court of Appeal the Crown felt they could no longer sustain these convictions.

Categorisation

Hill claimed that all Six were to be re-categorised within a matter of days. However, the Home Office have confirmed to Mr. Murray that some time will elapse before a final decision is made. The Home Office will keep the Embassy informed on this point. Hill enquired about Ronnie McCartney's transfer request. He was told that representations had been made to the Home Office and a decision would be made shortly.

Hill's personal losses

He said "he had lost everything - his wife, children, the lot". His wife has been unable to settle since 1974 although his children visit him. His father died last year and he feels bitter that he was not allowed to see him until he had collapsed into unconsciousness. His mother, he feels, does not have long to live as she is pining for her husband whom she knew since they were teenagers. He feels she is "clinging on" to see him released.

Future developments

He said he is sure "he is going home", he thought they would be out by now if the Guildford Four had been first into the Court of Appeal. He said the Home Office are "scratching their heads to see what avenue can be found to let them out." Despite their anticipated disappointment at the Court of Appeal he had felt even then that they would be out in 1990. However, he was adamant that he will not leave prison until his name has been cleared. He stated emphatically he would go on hunger strike rather than spend two more Christmases in prison. Although he had 17 previous convictions when arrested, the only one of the Six to have a record, he was completely unprepared for the ferocious physical and mental assault on him by the West Midlands police and in particular by the then Dt. Sgt. Ray Bennett. Hill said he expected police officers to be arrested shortly after the opening of the May inquiry. He said the ramifications of the process under way are enormous and there are many prisoners in Gartree alone watching carefully for the officers who "put them away" to be suspended.

Conclusion

The release of the Guildford Four and related new interest in their case has given great hope to him. He had complained strongly in October that he was starving in prison on his wage of £3.50 per week. On this occasion in the course of the visit we were interrupted by a Warden who asked him to sign for a cheque for £100 from one of the campaign groups. While his attitude towards the prison regime was uncompromising he did not show the aggression or biting sarcasm directed against the Government, evident on my last visit on 9 October. On that occasion, together with Gerry Conlon, he had spoken with disdain for the efforts of successive Governments on behalf of both groups. On this occasion he clearly felt he now has something to hope for and he was able to reflect on and appreciate the extensive efforts being made by the Government on behalf of the Birmingham Six.


James J. Hennessy