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20 May 1981

H.E. Dr. Eamon Kennedy,
Ambassador
London.

Dear Ambassador,

I have received a personal account from the Ambassador to the Holy See of a recent conversation with Archbishop Silvestrini, Secretary of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, in which the latter brought up the situation in Northern Ireland. His Grace was evidently well briefed on the question, and had notably studied the Taoiseach's statements of 4, 5 and 12 May about the hunger strikes in Long Kesh.

The Archbishop wondered whether "re-partition" would not be proposed as offering a solution. Ambassador Coffey replied along our usual lines, that the intermingling of the Communities would make any new delimitation very difficult and that in particular Belfast would constitute a very major problem.

The question arises whether the Archbishop's reference to re-partition has any significance beyond incidental fact-finding during a diplomatic contact. Our colleague believes it may have and wonders whether some British politicians are now thinking that re-partition, even if it would not furnish a solution in perpetuity might at least give Britain a respite from the Irish problem for a number of years and make critical observers in Western Europe and North America believe that Britain was proposing a settlement which would be fair to both communities. You may wish to comment on this speculation.

There has recently, of course been some airing of views amongst interested members of the Labour Party but re-partition has not to my knowledge been mentioned. It is perhaps more likely that it would have been considered amongst members of the Conservative Party perhaps amongst Catholics, if we are to accept that Monsignor Silvestrini's question was indeed inspired by British thinking of any kind. We would be glad to know if you have any wind of such thinking.

Yours sincerely,

D.M. Neligan.