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FM HAVANA 191650Z SEP 81

TO PRIORITY FCO

TEL NO 230 OF 19 SEPTEMBER

INFO TO NIO BELFAST AND DUBLIN

INFO SAVING TO WASHINGTON AND UKMIS NEW YORK.

YOUR TEL NO 183: CASTRO AND NORTHERN IRELAND.

1. CASTRO DULY CAME TO MY RECEPTION LAST NIGHT AND, ACCOMPANIED BY VICE PRESIDENT CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ, STAYED FOR TWO AND A HALF HOURS OF PRIVATE CONVERSATION, ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON THE SUBJECT OF NORTHERN IRELAND, WITH THE LEADERS OF THE BRITISH DELEGATION (MESSRS PAGE AND JEFFREY THOMAS AND LORD HUGHES) TOGETHER WITH PERCEVAL AND MYSELF.
2. MR PAGE SPOKE MAINLY ABOUT THE UK'S RECORD AND POLICY ON HUMAN RIGHTS; MR JEFFREY THOMAS ADDRESSED LEGAL ISSUES; AND LORD HUGHES GAVE A COMPREHENSIVE EXPOSE OF THE PRISON REGIME IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REASONS WHY THE HUNGER-STRIKERS' DEMANDS WERE UNACCEPTABLE. I SPOKE AS INSTRUCTED IN YOUR TUR, ADDING THAT CASTRO'S HUMANITARIAN CONCERN MIGHT HAVE HAD MORE POSITIVE IMPACT IF IT HAD BEEN EXPRESSED IN MORE TEMPERATE TERMS AND HAD EXTENDED TO THE IRA'S VICTIMS. AT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION HE AGREED TO MY REQUEST FOR ACCESS TO SENIOR CUBAN OFFICIALS TO EXPLAIN HMG'S POSITION MORE FULLY, ADDING THAT I WAS WELCOME TO SPEAK TO HIM TOO ON THE SUBJECT.
3. CASTRO WAS AT HIS MOST CHARMING, LISTENING WITH COURTESY AND APPARENT INTEREST AND IN TURN SPEAKING CALMLY AND WITH EVIDENT SINCERITY. BUT THERE WAS LITTLE MEETING OF MINDS AND THE CURRENT CUBAN CAMPAIGN ON THE SUBJECT IS UNLIKELY TO ABATE. ( AT THE IPU CONFERENCE A DRAFT RESOLUTION CONDEMNING HMG'S VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND HAS BEEN INTRODUCED BY THE EAST GERMAN DELEGATION IN RETALIATION FOR THE TABLING OF A WESTERN RESOLUTION ON AFGHANISTAN).

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/4. CASTRO

4. CASTRO EXPLAINED THAT THE COLOURFUL LANGUAGE OF HIS SPEECH HAD BEEN QUOTE LITERARY UNQUOTE: HE DID NOT REGARD HMG AS TYRANNICAL, WHICH WOULD BE ABSURD, BUT HAD USED THE WORD TO DESCRIBE ITS ATTITUDE ON THIS ONE ISSUE. THE EXAMPLE OF THE HUNGER-STRIKERS HAD MADE A PROFOUND IMPACT ON WORLD OPINION. HE WAS EXPRESSING THIS, WITHOUT SEEKING TO ENTER INTO THE SUBSTANCE OF THE COMPLEX PROBLEM OF NORTHERN IRELAND. HE ASKED WHETHER CONCESSIONS WOULD REALLY CAUSE THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO CRUMBLE? HE PRAISED THE WISDOM AND FLEXIBILITY OF BRITAIN, THE POWER WHICH HAD BEST ACHIEVED DECOLONISATION.

5. CASTRO VOLUNTEERED THAT CUBA, WHICH WAS INVOLVED WITH MANY REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, HAD NO (REPEAT NO) CONTACT WITH THE IRA.

6. WE EXPLAINED THE CRIMINAL STATUS (AND ACTIONS) OF THE IRA PRISONERS, BUT CASTRO, HARKING BACK TO HIS OWN EXPERIENCE, AND CITING THE ORIGIN OF REVOLUTIONARY AND ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENTS GENERALLY, MAINTAINED THE VALIDITY OF THE CONCEPT OF 'POLITICAL PRISONER' AND THE NEED FOR VIOLENT ACTION IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS. THE EXISTENCE IN THE CASE OF NORTHERN IRELAND OF THE BALLOT BOX AS A MEANS TO PEACEFUL CHANGE PREDICTABLY MEANT LITTLE TO HIM.

7. AT THE MORNING SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE, LORD HUGHES ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE ASKED FOR ACCESS TO CUBAN PRISONS TO MATCH THE OFFER MADE PREVIOUSLY BY MR PAGE TO HAVE CUBANS VISIT THE MAZE. THE CUBAN REACTION WAS TO AGREE PROMPTLY. LORD HUGHES DID NOT REVERT TO THE MATTER WITH CASTRO.

THOMAS

[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]

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