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### CSSP Newsletter-No.5 (1970)

Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers

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# CSSP - NEWSLETTER - CSSP

Congregazione dello Spirito Santo

Clivo di Cinna, 195 - 00136 Roma

February 18, 1970

No. 5

SPECIAL ISSUE

27A-51-5

on

EAST CENTRAL NIGERIA

Indictment

Charge No. PMC/.....87..... C/70

Commissioner of Police

versus

Lawrence Desmond O'Sullivan (m)

Count 1: That you Lawrence Desmond O'Sullivan on or about 17th day of January 1970 at Port-Harcourt in the Port Harcourt Magisterial District, entered Nigeria unlawfully by failing as you were in duty bound to report to an Immigration Officer for examination and thereby committed an offence contrary to section 45 (1) (b) of the Immigration Act, 1963 and punishable under section 47 (1) of the same Act.

Count 2: That you Lawrence Desmond O'Sullivan between November 1969 and January 1970 at Orlu in Nigeria accepted employment without the consent in writing of the Chief Federal Immigration Officer and thereby committed an offence contrary to section 45 (1) (b) of the Immigration Act, 1963 and punishable under section 47 (1) of the same Act.

Signature illegible

Police Officer

Date of Arraignment:..... 27 - 1 - 70

Plea:  
Finding:  
Sentence:  
Court:

Magistrate:  
Order:  
Prosecutor:  
Date of adjournment:  
Date:  
Bail:

The other missionaries received similar charge-sheets.

IHIOMA MISSION - DIARY OF EVENTS

Monday, 12th January

The news is confirmed that Owerri is overrun by the advancing Federal troops. For the Fathers, their decision has already been taken - to remain in their mission-stations, and when the time comes identify themselves as missionaries. The last plane left on Saturday and those from the various relief agencies who did not wish to be present at the end, have gone.

4.40 p.m. A small group of Federal soldiers enters the grounds of Ihioma mission, and advances up the avenue, without any undue display of force. The Fathers, dressed in white soutane, and the others living in the mission, move out to meet them, hands held high over their heads. The Captain in command greets the missionaries politely and discusses the situation with them. One of the Fathers is allowed to accompany the soldiers to the Holy Rosary convent nearby. The troops are well-disciplined and help to restore order and suppress looting which has already begun.

The officer-in-charge is now billeted in Ihioma mission house and it is here that contact is established with Mr. Eke, the Biafran Minister for Information, who brings the news that Colonel Effiong has surrendered.

Tuesday, 13th. High-ranking officers of the Biafran army assemble in the mission compound and from there proceed to Owerri to meet the Federal High Command.

For the next two days, Tuesday and Wednesday, the Fathers live with the Nigerian army, whom they find, on the whole, well-behaved.

Wednesday, 14th. In the evening we are told that all "Caritas personnel" is to be assembled and brought to Port Harcourt the next day.

Thursday, 15th. 9.30 a.m. The missionaries, driving their own cars, are brought in convoy to Owerri, where their passports are taken and they are examined for about two hours. Afterwards, the convoy proceeds to Aba, where we pass the night - some accommodated in the C.O's house, others in the cars. We discover that another group from Awo-omama has been detained here in Aba for the past four or five days.

Friday, 16th. The convoy continues its journey and arrives at Port Harcourt. Here the missionaries are searched and brought to the Cedar Palace Hotel, where the living conditions are good. All are asked to make statements, admitting illegal entry and mentioning their connection with "Caritas Internationalis". Some make statements, others not.

For over a week, we remain under house arrest. Movement is very limited as our cars have been taken. However, we receive welcome visits from Archbishop Aggey, Fr. Rod Crowley, C.M., Fr. McGuinness, S.M.A. and an Irish Embassy Secretary. Every effort is being made to secure our release but there is no way of knowing what the authorities intend. Bishop Whelan, who at this time was free to move around Owerri, also called. We learned that another group of missionaries is being detained in the Officers' Mess in Port Harcourt.

Monday, 26th. We are told to be ready for an interview at 2 p.m. This is to take place at Port Harcourt prison to which we are brought. We spend the night in the prison warders' club, a building belonging to the prison but not inside the prison walls. Two of the Marist Brothers establish contact with Mr. J. Small of the Irish Embassy, which has not been informed of the proceedings.

Tuesday, 27th. At 10 a.m. we were whisked by 'Jeep' to the Magistrate's Court, and in the interval between descending from the jeep and entering the courtroom, we are handed a charge sheet, thus learning for the first time that we are to stand trial. The charges against us are 1) illegal entry and 2) unlawful employment.

The proceedings begin at once. The Sisters and Brothers are taken first and ordered to pay a fine. Then comes the Fathers' turn. When the first Father has taken his stand in the dock, the Prosecuting Counsel makes the charges, and adds insinuations about "so-called missionaries" who gave military and other help to the rebel regime. At this there are loud protests in the courtroom, amounting to a "furore", so that the magistrate adjourns the court. On resumption, those responsible apologise, but the Magistrate seems to be taking a serious view of this "contempt of court" and now he proceeds to hand down "six months hard labour on each count" to the defendants. Almost all the missionaries, fearing to provoke

the authorities, plead "guilty" and admit there are no extenuating circumstances. However, four were not sentenced to prison for reasons that were not always consistent - length of service in the country, service in the "Rivers" area of which the capital is Port Harcourt, recent entry into the country, etc. But the validity of these same reasons was not admitted in the case of others who were in the same situation but were nonetheless sentenced.

The business of the court ended at 4 p.m. and twenty-one of us were conveyed to prison in the Black Maria to serve our sentence. Along with us was a Holy Rosary Sister, who had pleaded not guilty and was remanded in custody. Another of the Sisters elected to spend the night with her in the prison. The following day, the Sister in detention was fined and discharged.

The 21 men were put into a room 21' x 15' which was designed to accommodate 2 prisoners. Conditions were fairly bad; there were some beds, but no mattresses or bedclothes. The situation improved shortly. A second hut was provided, so we split up into two groups of ten; one of the Brothers had paid a fine and been discharged, leaving us 20 in all. So 20 of us lived in 2 huts, which, in normal times, would have accommodated 2 prisoners each. The Superintendent of the prison reminded us constantly that we were convicted criminals, not prisoners of war, but, at the same time, he did what he could to make our stay less unpleasant. He allowed us to receive European food cooked at the hotel for us by the Sisters, and in fact, some of us ate better in the prison than we had for a long time. Again, those of the group who had been discharged or fined were allowed to visit us and to bring mattresses, medicines and other necessities.

We very soon settled into a regular routine, partly imposed by the prison regime and partly by ourselves. At 8.00 p.m. we were locked into our little huts, at first, in the dark; but eventually we got electric light and could use the time profitably. At 6.30 a.m. the doors of the huts were unlocked and we could spend the day in an enclosed "compound" of about an acre, in which our huts stood. For our morning ablutions we had one tap and three buckets. Then there was celebrated Mass out of doors: fortunately it is the dry season. We had one Mass-box and the local Yoruba clergy provided us with hosts and wine. Apart from the principal celebrant the rest of us celebrated in our white soutanes.

After breakfast, there was a period for lectures and discussions on Scripture, Liturgy, etc. We were a varied group. The pastoral clergy were glad to be able to avail of the services of the Seminary professors to bring them up to date, while the Seminary professors

were very interested in the practical pastoral applications which the active missionaries could contribute. Then there was reading, talking, and pastimes of various kinds. For a while there was even a football, which got kicked over the wall, but eventually it was punctured.

It is worthy of note that on February 2nd, one of the Seminary professors contributed a paper on Father Libermann. He spoke on "abnegation and missionary adaptation". Was there ever a more moving tribute to our Founder? It was he who started it all; it was because of him that we had come to Africa and were now in prison. But like the Apostles, we could only rejoice that we were counted worthy to suffer in the name of Jesus (Acts 5,41).

In this way a week went by. We were visited by the Magistrate who condemned us, by the Attorney General, the Commissioner of Police, etc. We also received a visit from Bishop Whelan, but were distressed to learn that he too, along with the group from Owerri, was now in detention in Port Harcourt, as we had been before our trial. And yet, all this time, Fr. Frawley and the group in Enugu were allowed to move round freely and do their mission work. In fact, they had been issued with passes, but only of short duration, a month or two months. How explain this discrepancy in the treatment of missionaries?

It would appear that the difference is due to the policy pursued by different military commanders. South of Uli airstrip, the country had been occupied by the Third Marine Division, whose commanding officer was very much opposed to Caritas Internationalis and the activities of the missionaries. The area in the North was under the control of the First Division, whose commander judged it useful that the missionaries should remain to help with the relief operations -- at least till they could be replaced.

Tuesday, February 3rd. An unexpected visit from the prison superintendent at 11.30. We are given three minutes to collect our "luggage"; and instructed to leave behind whatever might be of use to other European prisoners (... Bishop Whelan and the others, perhaps?) By army lorries we are conveyed to the Cedar Palace Hotel to collect our belongings, and here we are joined by those who had been fined instead of being sent to prison. By 1.30 p.m. we are on our way to Lagos.

At the airport in Lagos there was quite a welcoming party -- apart from our military escort. The Apostolic Delegate was present, along with his secretary; the Archbishop of Lagos, Archbishop Aggey, Mgr. Fitzgibbon and several Fathers from the Lagos area. The Irish Ambassador was also there and diplomatic representatives from the American and British Embassies. Security was tight and the press was excluded, but when we had been brought to the airport hotel we could meet our distinguished visitors who now had been joined by Archbishop Arinze of Onitsha, Bishop Murray of Makurdi and Fr. Obioku. We learn that we are to be expelled from the country, but it is not clear if this is legally and officially "deportation". The following morning we concelebrate Mass with Bishop Murray. At 10.30 the first group leaves for Geneva, and the others about an hour later.

In all 23 Fathers were expelled, of whom 17 had been imprisoned. Another group of 29, among whom is Bishop Whelan, are awaiting trial in Port Harcourt. There are still two groups left at their work. One is in Orlu, where there are extensive relief works, in particular a specialised pediatric hospital recently built by German Caritas, and caring for 800 children. Further north, around Enugu, Fr. Frawley and his group appear to have full freedom of movement still.

And the future? For the present we simply do not know. We are all anxious to return to work among our well-beloved people for whom we have already laboured so much. We hope that before long the powers that be will come to realise that all we ever intended or did was for the good of our flock, our fellow-men. Since our expulsion was not officially deportation (our passports have not been endorsed), it appears that the legal obstacles to our return are not insurmountable. In any case, we are pledged to work for the spread of God's Kingdom on earth and for the service of our neighbour - if not in Nigeria, then elsewhere. There are very many places in the world where it is true that the harvest is so great and the labourers so few!

S. M. W.

Christmas 1969

by

Fr. Robert Eberhardt C.S.Sp.

(Fr. Eberhardt, accompanied by Fr. Thomas Clynes of the American Province - East, chose to spend the Christmas with the confreres in East Central Nigeria. The following is an extract from his Journal).

December 24th: I celebrated Mas after one of the parish priests who was getting an early start on a busy day. They had to visit their twenty-eight feeding centres and afterwards face the prospect of long and tiring hours in the confessional - it was Christmas eve. These twenty-eight feeding centres were dispensing two meals and milk three times a week to 16,000 people. A nearby mission took up the task on the remaining days. The curtain was just beginning to lift on these mercy operations. I was in for more staggering figures in the ensuing days.

..... We reached Ihiala in time for the evening meal, which was more like a coffee break for the parish Fathers since the confession lines were still long and promised to go quite far into the evening. It was Christmas Eve all right ..... I was scheduled to sing the 7 O'clock High Mass in church the next morning.

December 25th: Christmas day dawned sunny but sticky. High Mass began at 7.30 a.m. because of the vast number of communions at the 6 O'clock Mass. There was an experience in store for me - preaching in English and having sentence by sentence interpreted into Ibo.

I could only say how happy I was to have the privilege of spending Christmas day with them. The words "Merry Christmas" would stick in my throat. I spoke of the hope that is born every day with a man's awakening and reminded them that Christ's coming to earth symbolised that hope. Many of the upturned, intent faces seemed to tell me that hope was beginning to dim. It was a difficult sermon even with time in between interpretations to get my next sentence together. I ran the hope theme into the ground. It has always been a favourite with me. One of the few quotations I can remember is Scott's:

Despair is never quite so deep in sinking as in seeming.

Despair is hope just rocked to sleep for better chance of dreaming.

During the day I visited some of the feeding centres and tried my hand at dishing out the fare. The patience and discipline among the 400 or 500 people at each of these centres was surprising. I spent the remainder of the day visiting various projects, among them an orphanage that was soon to be completed and taken over by native Nigerian Nuns.

Spiritans and the Last Days of Biafra

These lines are being penned exactly four weeks after our arrest by the Federal Nigerian troops at Awo-omama in Orlu Division. Looking back on those weeks, weeks of movement under armed guard, of waiting and finally of trial and imprisonment, it is difficult to sort out one's impressions of the last days of Biafra. For us in the House of Theology, Awo-omama, the end of term brought activity of a different kind: we moved into parishes where help was needed. In my own case, I did supply work in a parish without a priest for the period of the vacation. Fr. Jerry Creedon divided his attention between the Seminary, where feeding centres were still functioning under the care of the Holy Ghost scholastics, and his old parish of Issu which was being cared for by Fr. Gerry Gogan. One's general impression of Christmas was one of ceaseless activity supervising the feeding centres, maintaining the supply of medicines and listening endlessly to individual needs and problems. At the same time the pastoral work of the parish continued smoothly - due in great part to the wonderful staff-work of the catechist - against a background of increasing misery and disillusionment.

For Spiritans working in their parishes, generally in two's but often alone, the Christmas celebrations held in a central mission or community were great for morale. Despite the personality problems one expects to find in any group, their wartime experience had forged a bond of confidence and sympathy which made life much more than merely bearable: this experience was to prove valuable later on when the first groups were rounded up and brought to Port Harcourt. This subject will be touched on when we reach the period of detention and imprisonment.

No doubt the confreres living near the front to the East and South East were prepared for the military collapse; they, after all, had to live with a situation of withdrawal and evacuation, not to mention the refugee problem. For myself, working alone in Oguta, the routine of the parish and the pressure of human needs prevented the contacts which could have prepared me for the collapse of the front and for our arrest. As it was, I received a warning barely twenty-four hours before the Federal Army pushed down the road from Owerri to Awo-omama. During this period we had prepared some plans for evacuating the Seminary library and personnel to missions further from the front and the mainroad. In practice, however, the Federal advance was so swift and the Biafran collapse so complete, that none of these schemes could be carried out.

Accordingly, on Saturday, January 10th, 1970, after lunch with the Fathers at Awo-omama, I realised that it would be impossible to return to Oguta. Cars were being commandeered on the mainroad, and the Federal Migs had begun to rocket the bridge to discourage any demolition attempts on the part of the Biafran sappers.

During the early afternoon the sound of small arms began near the bridge. A half-hearted attempt to blow the bridge was made by Biafran sappers; but the advance was not slowed down. By 2.30 p.m. we had been lined-up in front of the Seminary, Fathers, seminarians and some frightened house-boys; our "liberation" had begun.

The next three days were spent in the Seminary compound, days of mixed feelings of relief and uncertainty. We had hoped at first to be able to remain in the war zone and utilise our personnel and knowledge of the locality. There was one hospital and one large clinic (for

children) in Awo-omama. The medical staff had fled into the bush, and the patients were virtually abandoned from Saturday afternoon until Sunday morning when Fr. C. Gogan was allowed to visit the hospital and bury the dead. However, our hopes were short-lived. On the Monday the Commander of the 17 Commando Brigade ordered us out of his sector. We were given 2 hours to pack and report at Owerri: the period of detention had begun.

For myself, packing was no problem; I had lost everything and depended completely on the confreres. This was true of many others, as I was to find out later on when the various groups met and compared notes in Port Harcourt. In general our story and experience was similar to the other groups arrested by troops of the First Commando Division. We were left in our missions during the few days needed for the military take-over. After that we were moved to Aba where we spent some days in the Officers' Mess. The next stage was from Aba to Port Harcourt where we found that an earlier group, headed by Fr. Joe Carter, was already in detention in the Officers' Mess.

After being searched and listed by the C.I.D. we were moved to the Cedar Palace Hotel - for ever after, known to the group as the "Seedy Palace": a novel experience in community living had begun. Father P. O'Connor had his Mass box and so we could have a concelebration for all on the landing of the third floor. This was conducted according to the new Ordo Missae, and community singing added a very valuable element to our liturgy. Needless to say, the Marist Brothers and the Sisters had their own personal contribution to make to the daily concelebration, a contribution which should prove valuable to all the Fathers in their future ministry.

Group activities were soon organised. The morning conference and discussion were particularly successful; they ranged from "The New Liturgy" to "Anthropology and missionary adaptation". A symposium was held on the scope of our relief work in Biafra, and a general report drawn up on the activities of the different members of the group, statistics, etc.

This period of detention was followed by a short but suspenseful interim when we were suddenly moved from the hotel to a deserted Social Centre near Port Harcourt prison. Within 24 hours we had been tried and the majority sentenced to six months imprisonment on two counts: illegal entry and unlawful employment in Nigeria. In this way another experience in community living began for the 24 Fathers and Brothers who began to serve their sentence on 27th January.

This period was passed in two small houses built originally for four European prisoners! A small section had been fenced off from the prison compounds which included an exercise area in the shadow of the prison wall. Our life was soon informally but rationally organised within the framework of the prison horarium. The day began with "opening-up" and a counting of heads at 6.30 in the morning, and ended with "lock-up" at 8 p.m. A sung Mass was concelebrated every day in the open air before the small prison blocks; a little table served as altar and our benches were brought out into the open air as pews. Once again the experience seems to have been a deep and satisfying one for all the group.

The Sisters, now living under guard at the hotel, were allowed to prepare our meals which were brought in and eaten in the shade afforded by the prison wall. Physical training classes were provided by Brother Norbert who proved a popular teacher; and no doubt these exer-



cises helped to maintain the morale and the good spirits of the group. They also provided considerable entertainment to the prisoners in the other compounds! Scripture readings and discussions continued, and were generally appreciated; for this we were indebted to Fr. Jerry Creedon for expert comment and advice. Fr. C. Gogan undertook to treat the cases of conjunctivitis among the inmates of our compound, and Sister Clara managed to badger the Prison Governor into allowing her to come in person and supervise the treatment.

On the lighter side there was football, bridge and light reading to while away the hours. Fr. Milo Smithwich's own contribution (apart from his jokes and good humour) was a class of "bridge for beginners" which proved his worth as a teacher. All these activities helped to maintain the group in good shape, physically and spiritually. Indeed it was noticeable, on release from prison, how fit and contented the individual members of the group appeared to the anxious confreres outside! Perhaps the most lasting effect of our period of detention and imprisonment was the experience of celebrating the Eucharist together in a simple and spontaneous manner. And it seemed providential that most of the group were able to go to Rome on their way home from Lagos, there to celebrate the Eucharist once again in happier circumstances.

G. T.

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FACTS AND FIGURES

Ihioma: Centre of Relief Operation:

An average tonnage of 250 tons arrived nightly in December 1969. (Record tonnage was on November 19th, with 376 tons).

Distribution: Caritas had 120 lorries

(monthly transport bill for 97 lorries used between Uli airstrip and Iheoma: £14,000 sterling)

- 145 drivers
- 90 conductors
- 60 escorts
- 130 storekeepers and labourers
- 30 clerical staff
- 75 police and security
- 75 mechanics

Every second day Ihioma sent lorry loads of food to 7 substations or substores: Nto-Edino (for Ikot-Ekpene sector); Ichida (for Onitsha Province); Obowo (for Umuahia Province); Awo-Idemili (for Orlu Province); Nguru (for Mbaise); and two stores at Owerri (one for Owerri Province and one for south of Owerri). Owerri stores alone handled 45 tons of food daily.

From these seven substores, food went out to each mission or parish, and from there to the feeding centres, of which there were 1 400 catering for 1,300,000 people - mainly children, and 100 sick-bays (averaging 300 patients each); this does not include W.C.C. relief. The above are only Caritas centres and sick-bays.

Agricultural projects: The Ihioma agricultural centre ("Spadeville") provided equipment and seed for the plantation of 5,500

acres (1,500: Caritas farms; 3,000 acres planted by refugees supplied with seed; 1,000 acres planted by children).

Equipment: 6 tractors  
13 threshers  
12 rice mills  
20 chain saws  
1,200 machetes and hoes

In the store when the surrender came:

1,000 bags of maize seed  
500 bags of rice seed  
-----  
1,500 men employed for farming  
£20,000 monthly wages

Detained in military H.Q., Port Harcourt from 10/1/70 to 26/1/70, with many interrogations by C.I.D.:

Frs. F. Leahy	J. Carter - fined
D. O'Sullivan	L. Horkin "
F. Mullan	P. Gallagher "
T. McCarthy	
S. Broderick	T. O'Neill - no charge

Detained in Cedar Palace Hotel, Port Harcourt from 16th to 26th January, 1970, without interrogations:

Bro. Vincent - fined	Sr. Gertrude - fined
Sr. Charles "	Sr. Clara "
Sr. Christine "	Fr. D. McManus - no charge
Sr. Aidan "	

Sentenced to 6 months imprisonment with hard labour, on 27/1/1970:

Frs. F. Leahy	M. Waldron
D. O'Sullivan	J. Creedon
<del>F. Mullan</del>	G. Tannam
T. McCarthy	T. Crean
S. Broderick	D. O'Connor
M. Smithwick	J. Finucane
T. Kelly	C. Gogan
A. Kelly	P. O'Connor
J. Daly	Bro. Lewis
V. O'Brien	Bro. Ignatius
	Bro. Norbert

The above prisoners were released on 3/2/1970

THE FOLLOWING IS A LETTER FROM BISHOP G.E.I. COCKIN TO THE  
EDITOR OF THE LONDON TIMES.

(Bishop Cockin was Anglican Bishop of Owerri from 1959 to January, 1969. He is now retired).

Sir,

The sentence that General Gowon's government has allowed to be passed on Roman Catholic missionaries who served in the former Biafra are both unfair and likely to be unfortunate in their effects.

Unfair, because they, like all of us who remained there during the war years, felt that our primary loyalty was not to the beneficiaries of this or that military coup nor to the policy of the day of our own government but to the people we were there to serve. This necessarily meant that we continued to pay our taxes and apply for our driving licences and entry and residence permits to the only authority in a position to demand or issue them, the authority on the spot.

Unfortunate in its effects, not only on the people who need the help they are uniquely qualified to give at this time, but in its probable consequences for inter-Church relationships, never too easy in Nigeria though greatly improved as a result of the common relief effort. General Gowon will no doubt continue to assure us that his conscience is so enviably clear, but to Nigerians this will be seen as the Anglican Gowon doing down the Roman Catholics. It is an unforeseen and unfortunate consequence of the last-minute withdrawal of the missionaries and relief workers of the other Churches, justifiable as this was in itself, that the Roman Catholics are left to suffer alone in such a way. Many of us would I know be proud to share with them so honourable an imprisonment.

We are informed that our representative in Lagos is to "inquire as to the intentions" of the authorities with regard to the three British citizens imprisoned. Surely more might be expected of a Government that claims to have preserved its influence in Lagos at such a cost.

Yours faithfully,

Bishop G.E.I. Cockin,

The Rectory,

Bainton,

Driffield,

Yorkshire,

E N G L A N D.