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Diary of a Hunger Strike

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Summary:

Activist Ben Thompson describes his participation in a 1982 protest against the placement of cruise missiles at the United States Air Base in Comiso, Italy. Thompson describes the day-to-day events of the protest and hunger strike, including meetings with Italian politicians and the press. This unpublished narrative was written for circulation among Thompson's friends. See also his related pamphlet, the END Special Report "Comiso."

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Ben Thompson
DIARY OF A HUNGER STRIKE
November 1982

There was hardly time to do anything before I left London, just to throw a few things into a bag, unwashed, and get down to Luton for the plane. On the flight over the clouds were low, a landscape of ice-bergs ranging way down beneath the plane. Lights were twinkling here and there, representing the threatened habitations or mankind. As we travelled the sun was setting over to the right of us, washing the cloud tops with ruby coloured rays. Up there there is another landscape, timeless and archaic, indifferent to the human disaster preparing itself down below. I remembered the time when my own life seemed to be the life of a free and independent actor in a separate and solid universe, a solid universe which for me no longer exists. All that was solid has become contingent, the dream of a transient physicist-geographer; now our real existence lies somewhere up here above this bleak landscape and all our freedom lies in the infinitesimal where our own creative and destructive forces meet in this, probably their concluding battle. For a moment I felt a familiar excitement at the thought that perhaps, after all the centuries everything laid out below me could, after all, simply vanish in the batting of an eyelid, in one impatient huff of the big bad wolf.

13 Nov.

Denise and Rean met me at the airport. We went to visit some friends of theirs and I ate some Salami and drank some wine. Afterwards Imco told me that they said I ate quite a lot!

14 Nov.

We went to lunch with Rean's parents. Rean's father got very indignant when he heard I was going on hunger strike at Comiso. "Your idea is very nice", he said, "but impractical, you will not obtain your demands". "What you should do is; firstly attain world revolution, and then, abolish war. Your idea is very nice, but too idealistic".

15 Nov.

I got up at 4 am and walked to the Piazza Marina, It was dark in Palermo, but already at 5 am there were one or two people about, waiting for their transport to work, sweeping leaves, one or two taxi drivers already waiting for a fare. I picked up a friendly Alsatian dog who followed me half-way across town. I arrived at Piazza Marina at 5.30, there was already a stall open for coffee, fruit juice and newspapers.

When I got into Comiso a friendly shopkeeper (Nicosi) saw me waiting for Cagnes and took me and my suitcase into his shop. Then Jorato came along, by chance, and then Cagnes shuffled along wearing a cord jacket and a flat cap and smoking a cigarette. We all went into a bar, also the American and French representatives and Marina etc. The Italian representative of 'Trudy' (Soviet Trades Unions newspaper) interviewed us a little, but not much. I spoke to him later a little, he said he didn't see the need for an independent peace movement in the USSR as the Russians are already fully aware of the dangers of nuclear arms.

THE HUNGER STRIKE

We set ourselves up in CUDIP & I go and have a final drink of fruit juice before the official start of the fast at 4 pm. We go and pay a visit to the Franciscan monastery where we will be staying. The chief monk asks as some questions. He says he wants it to be understood that they cannot be seen to be taking a political position, "ne alla sinistra, ne alla destra" but that their goal was the same as ours, peace. There's some negotiation with Cagnes which I don't quite follow, but the outcome seems to be that we don't need to be believers, as we are working for this common goal. He says he will need to see our passports, and to show them to the questore (police chief) to be sure that all is in order.

We come back to sleep there at 8 pm, the time fixed for our return to the monastery every evening. They put us in a quiet empty dormitory with about 25 beds in it. The monastery is very tranquil, and has a little garden in the centre of the cloister, with orange and lemon trees, and a stone urn in which bright coloured goldfish swim. From the dormitory windows we can look out over the garden, and also over the terrace above the cloister, where there are flowering creepers and cacti in pots. The roof of this part of the building is made from terra cotta tiles weighted in many places with large stones. Fabio says that the cloister dates from the seventeenth century.

16 Nov.

We wake and get dressed before eight, and Cagnes shows us the 'Comunicato no 1' which just contains the demands of the hunger strikers and says that Roland Vogt is making a solidarity fast in Bonn, also thanking the friars for their hospitality after the Comune have refused to allow us the use of any municipal buildings, even empty ones. Cagnes says the hospitality of the monks is very important for the Catholic community, and that it is the first support given by the local church to the peace movement. We spend the day in CUDIP, not such a good place, as it is rather small and chilly and gets also very overcrowded when there are lots of visitors. The visitors are lovely, very warm and energetic, even though one girl embarrasses herself severely by walking in eating a brioche out of a paper napkin; 'ciao', and Maurice starts to laugh hysterically. The poor girl backs out of the door offering apologies right and left. None of us would have minded her eating her brioche, Cagnes said 'Vieni qua', but it was the incongruity that was so funny.

17 Nov.

Today we move, to in the 'Confesercenti', a commune of shopkeepers. The building is warmer, there's a heater and proper toilets etc., but no natural light in our room, which is a bit of a bore. There's a pleasant tiled floor with an interesting pattern, and a window which opens onto a sort of blind shaft, at the bottom of which there are two sinks and a washing machine. During the day various people visit. There's a visit from a peace group from Sciacca (near Agrigento). They promise to support us and give us financial aid as far as possible. There's a visit from the Lega di Contadini (League of Peasant Farmers). Their president is a splendid thin old man with protruding ears and a bronzed skin. We talk about stopping the base; he says 'l'aqua sporca deve girare sempre, altrimenti puzza' (dirty water needs to stir continually, otherwise it stinks).

During the day Charles Gray comes to take over from Tim Heaney who has to continue on his travels. Charles is a sociologist, ex-university of Colorado, who gave up teaching to devote himself to the peace movement. He's written a book about political fasting. He goes back to the monastery to sleep during the afternoon, having only slept for 2 hours last night. Lorenzo is already there; he stayed in bed today with a cold, but he wants to continue with the fast. I ring up my friends at END and give them what information I can for the press conference tomorrow. Then there's the business of Frederico Sciveres' air ticket to the CND conference. I have to call them again and tell them about that.

Charles comes back at about 6.30. Some girls come in with a bunch of Gladioli and someone cuts a plastic mineral water bottle in half to make a vase. There's some sort of round table going on with a very large man in a flat cap. I pull up a chair and join it, but I've got no idea what's going on.

Then we go back to the monastery. Some of the girls and boys from the peace camp come with us. One of the boys makes a loud remark about the 'Collegio Serafico'. When we go in there are no monks to greet us. But in the dormitory we find the young padre who is looking after Lorenzo and has made him some Camomile tea (no sugar!). We have a little conference. It seems that the 'Commissione di Vigilanze', a broadcasting watchdog committee in the chamber of deputies, is having a meeting tomorrow and that two deputies who support Cagnes have telephoned and asked to have the demands put in writing so they can put them to the meeting. We turn in early, but I find it difficult to sleep. Still, it's very calm.

18 Nov.

In the morning we buy newspapers as usual, not much in them about us. The morning hours go slowly, rather boring. At about midday several members of the 'Lega di Contadini' come in and sit with us quietly for about half an hour. Some of the hunger strikers feel tired and take it in turns to go and lie down on the mattress in the little baggage room where Jose sleeps. I write a few letters. At about four it's decided that we'll go for a walk to relieve the boredom. We go into the Piazza Fontediana and stand around for a while chatting to people. Then Cagnes says 'We'll go to the library where your father will speak on Wednesday'. We go over to the library, which is in a large modern cultural centre, built by Cagnes when he was mayor. We look in the library itself, large, still in the process of organisation. I pick up a bound copy of l'Unita 1943-45. Brave stuff. An official comes to give us a guided tour. First we go to a room full of TV monitors from which you can keep an eye on every room in the library. Then we go to the discotheque. Cagnes had asked that we be allowed to do our fast here, but the administration refused. It's very comfortable, with foam rubber seats. It's unused, all the sound equipment having been stolen some time ago. Then we go upstairs to the lecture hall where Edward will speak. We sit there for a while, someone asks me to make a speech. I go behind the lectern and clown a little. Then we go out of the building and up onto the flat roof. The view of Comiso is beautiful. Below us there is a courtyard surrounded by a narrow building with a peg tiled roof. Many doors lead off the courtyard into the narrow building. Cagnes tells me that it's an old fish market which they are restoring for use as a museum. I ask where the fish came from, he says from the coast nearby. I ask if they still fish off the coast near

Comiso, he says not any more; the fishing is all motorised now, and happens off Messina and Trapania. I feel overwhelmed by the beauty of this little town with the hill behind it, and the peg-tiled roofs.

Then we go downstairs again. There is a room with a photo-exhibition which Cagnes brought back from Japan. Pictures of Hiroshima. An old woman 'Hibakshu'. "It's sometimes hard leading a lonely life, but I know that this will never happen to anyone ever again". I find all this very moving too. Then some people come in and tell Cagnes there's been a call from Rome. We all troop back to the Confesercenti.

There follows a long period of phone calls and visitors. Cagnes can't get through to his friend in Rome. Meanwhile a lot of visitors come. The two Dutch girls have brought more flowers and made another vase. A lot more of the regulars come, plus a few new faces. Then Cagnes comes in and gives us some news. He's spoken to an old Partisan leader, Pompeo Colajanni, who fought with Pertini during the war, and Colajanni has promised to go to Pertini tomorrow with our request. The 'Commissione di Vigilanza' didn't meet after all, on account of the government crisis. However, thirty deputies have signed a letter to the president of the RAI-TV asking him to accede to our request. They include PCI, PDUP, all the independent left, but also three socialists and a man from a small centre party in the north. We all feel that the news is good, and we feel greatly cheered. Marina is interviewing all of us for an article in l'Ora, Palermo. She wants to know our motives etc. for coming on the fast. They find a boy with a Polaroid to take a picture. We line up behind the table. He takes our picture, second time round he gets a satisfactory result. The picture expels itself automatically from the camera and develops itself miraculously before our eyes.

Then its time to go home. We have to hang around for ages in the square while Charles goes to CUDIP and telephones the States. Nicosi says that I look cold and promises to bring a pullover tomorrow. At the monastery the chief monk hands passports back to Charles and Imco, all in order.

19 Nov.

Again not much real sleep, although I don't feel tired. I suppose when the metabolism slows down the sleep-wakefulness rhythm becomes less pronounced. In the morning we come up to the Confesercenti and I write my diary and some letters as usual. Various pieces of good news arrive. Cagnes has telephoned Ninni Guccione of ACLI who says they haven't managed to do anything so far on account of the pope's impending visit (Saturday & Sunday), but that next week they'll get in their cars and come down here. A Christian Democrat member of the ARS, l'On Capitumino, promises to come here next week and make a formal presentation of a cheque for CUDIP. Cagnes says he gave half a month's salary from the ARS (I million lire) to CUDIP when it was founded. Also we hear that twenty PCI deputies are talking about coming here next week to meet us. The radio news talks about nothing but the pope's visit, but in the morning a cameraman and lighting man come from local TV in Ragusa and solemnly sweep the room with their instruments in complete silence. In the afternoon, thanks to a good article by Bronda in l'Unita (following the END press conference in the House of Commons), a journalist from Paese Sera rings and I give my first press interview in Italian, I explain that END and CND are not 'pacifist' organisations. I also translate for Charles.

Fabio looks a bit ill and depressed today. He's now stopped smoking. In the afternoon at about four we go for another little walk. Cagnes takes us down to a large courtyard in front of a seventeenth Century church, the Chiesa Madre. The courtyard is so constructed that it's like a pier which stands proud, about fifty feet above the town, with a sheer drop on three sides. Cagnes tells me that during the wars this is where the anti-fascist boys used to come and talk so that nobody could hear them. There's another church, with a splendid dome a little higher up the hill and Cagnes says that during the war this one was the fascist church, whilst the Chiesa Madre was used by the socialists, and one day the priest of the other church came down to the Chiesa Madre and burnt down the door. Below us on the right there is an ancient washing place where the women of Comiso used to come and wash their clothes. A collection of large flat stones with basins carved in them. Now surrounded by modern buildings, the water no longer flows through the washing place.

After we arrive back at the Confesercenti there are more visitors. The President of the Regional Union of Artisans comes, and also the President of the Regional Confesercenti, who has been out of the area and just returned last night. He is very supportive, and has some interesting things to say. As the day goes on there are more visitors. Some of the usual., and some new. At some stage there is a telegram of support from the wife and son of Pio la Torre. Someone brings a chess set and I play chess, first with Teresa, then with a Dutch girl who plays quite well.

We leave a bit early, because yesterday the monks complained that we got back too late. This suits me fine. Before we go to sleep Cagnes whispers to me that Pompeo Colajanni has spoken with Pertini, and it is almost certain that he will receive us. Also that a powerful PCI deputy with a particular interest in the media, Adalberto Minucci, will speak to the President of RAI TV on our behalf. I go to sleep cheered by this news.

20 Nov.

I don't sleep too much and today (Saturday) is rather hard. We get our article in Paese Sera. Quite good, though they haven't reported exactly what I said. It's boring because the pope is in Palermo today and tomorrow, and no one is too interested in us. We have a few good breaks. The copy of the letter from the thirty two deputies arrives, and in the afternoon Radio Ragusa comes to interview all of us. Mainly we just have to make a personal statement saying who we are and where we are from and why. I give mine in Italian, and they say it is clear enough for people to be able to understand. Later there are many visitors. A member of the ARS, vice-president of the Comiso Confesercenti who makes a point of telling us that he is not a communist but that he supports our goal in this campaign. Also the President of, and a worker from, the Comiso housing co-op, a traffic policeman, a PCI councillor from Ragusa. There's also an old man who says he founded the Communist Party in Comiso in 1944. He says he spent four months in gaol, eating potatoes. Otherwise we don't get much news; we aren't on the radio. Jane calls and keeps me up to date on things happening in London. I ring Cathy, but she's gone to Manchester. We go back to the monastery early. Cagnes is getting tired, he says that his shoes get heavier all the time. I feel tired because the doctor came today and told me that my blood pressure is a little low, and that I should take it easy. I don't sleep much, my mouth waters a lot

and I'm tormented by visions of prawn sag and tomato juice with Worcester sauce. At 12.30 I get up to go and take a piss and notice that there are still lights on in an adjacent part of the monastery. I'm intrigued to know what these monks do with their time. Apart from our encounters with them (tonight I didn't see anyone till I got to the foot of the dormitory stairs when the chief monk appeared from a store room), we never get any sight nor sound of them. There's often a little door open at the end of our corridor, I think its where the young padre sleeps, but we don't see him. I feel that they cultivate a state of quiet holy alertness, but can't make out how or where. Sometimes I think I hear plainsong during the night, but it generally turns out be an hallucination caused by spurious noise such as a motor car engine.

21 Nov.

In the morning we go out late because they are cleaning the rooms at the Confesercenti. We linger awhile in the Piazza on account of the sunshine, which is powerful today. The newspapers are full of the pope's fulminations against the Mafia, call for moral re-armament, etc. At the Confesercenti we have a session with a photographer from a national agency in Milan. He has a motor drive on his camera, and he takes a lot of pictures, both inside and outside on the street. Its a hard day, not much happens. The Dutch girls make a poster. I find this day very hard because I know that nothing will happen even though the afternoon and evening bring more visitors than ever. There's an old man with a mouth-organ. and I play a bit of guitar with him; we sound good in ensemble. Later I play chess, first with the Dutch girl, later with Jorato, and then with Imco which is quite stimulating. After many bad mistakes we arrive at a draw, four pawns and white square bishop against three pawns and black square bishop. The party hots up. There's a sing-song going on, high spirits. It must be the first party I've ever been to where there's no smoking and no eating and nothing but water to drink. Someone has got the boiler going, and there's hot water for showers. Imco and Charles have showers. Then back to the monastery. Cagnes seems despondent. There was a meeting in the Piazza this afternoon with between two and two and a half thousand people, which Cagnes says is very important. They didn't call for a strike because they think the fast will be finished within two or three days. Cagnes isn't so sure. He thinks that RAI TV will take a long time to crack. 'Sono nei guai'. I've done some telephoning today, and my folks are ringing some people to get them to send telegrams to RAI. Jonathan Dimpleby has offered to help find some names. Tomorrow I will ask my comrades at END to try and get some Labour MPs to sign one.

Before we go to sleep Cagnes tells us that there is a rumour that Fanfanni has done a deal with Berlinguer; less opposition from the Communists in return for a suspension of the base at Comiso. Apparently four days ago Spadolini is supposed to have said 'I would have continued with the programme of re-armament'. We feel cheered by this possibility, which is after all only a whisper of a rumour, however.

I don' sleep at all. My mouth waters and I feel somewhat nauseous. The nights are beginning to seem somewhat less welcome, even if they are still a change from the days.

22 Nov.

A dramatic morning. We are sitting around in the Confesercenti having a little meeting so that everyone can say how they feel and how long they are willing to go on with the fast. Cagnes, Fabio and Lorenzo are willing to go on indefinitely if need be. Charles says he has to go on Sunday, but could possibly postpone. Cagnes thinks I should go after two weeks as planned, I say I might be able to stay a little while, but later I realise there's no way that I could, the timing just doesn't allow it. Maurice will go on for three weeks. Josee doesn't think she will last too much longer, and Imco wants to break on Wednesday. Suzanne now appears to have joined us. We all go to be examined by the doctor who says that Suzanne should stop. We have a discussion, most of us think she should stop and start again later, as her blood pressure is low and she has her period, but she is determined to go on. Then a TV team arrive. Just at that moment there's a dramatic telephone call from a man in RAI TV. Cagnes has been lobbying them on the grounds that article 21 of the Italian Constitution gives any citizen the right to a hearing on TV. The man has a proposal for us. Either we get 1 1/2 minutes on the main TV news (the same as the pope's visit, they say), or we can have a 'Tam Tam', which is a 15 minute interview programme directly following the news at 8.30. The news has 7 million viewers, the 'Tam Tam' has 300,000. The TV team are asked to wait and we shut ourselves in for a rapid conference of war. We have only half an hour to decide, because the man is on his way to a conference in Florence and won't otherwise be back for three days.. There's a rapid and heated discussion. The Italians become verbose, and we have to keep shutting them up. Lorenzo seems to be the sticking point, he won't seem to agree, but he has no other proposal. All the others would settle for a 'Tam Tam' provided that we put all possible pressure or a mention on the news, which we feel we are entitled to. We all agree that it would be corrupt to haggle over a spot on the news, which is anyway a public information service. Eventually I say to Cagnes 'Rispondi, rispondi, rispondi' and he gets up and goes to the phone. Later he tells me that the man was standing in the doorway with his briefcase in his hand when the phone rang. Another half a minute, and we would have had to wait another three days.

Still, the deal isn't ratified yet. It has to go to a meeting of the RAI executive. There's a slight problem about this later when some of the campers start spreading it around that we have obtained 15 minutes on RAI-TV, and Fabio has to ring them and ask them to stop.

Then the TV team comes in. They are from a local station, but they feed material into a nation-wide network of local stations as well. We have a good interview, 20-25 minutes. Cagnes speaks well, I say something about CND and the nuclear free zones campaign, most of us speak. Then the interviewer gives a very sympathetic summing up where he says that he hopes the Missiles will never come. There are also various newspaper journalists, a Dutch journalist interviews Imco for his paper in Holland.

After all this I feel drained. It seems that success may be in sight, but how far away? I go and sit in the quiet room where Josee is sleeping. A man comes in and offers me some chewing gum. I don't feel tempted. Later in the day two English girls come with a tape recorder and interview me. They have both lived in Rome for four years. I don't know what the interview is for, but it's really good to speak English with English people, and it lifts my spirits. I become quite eloquent. After they've gone the day becomes a bit of a drag. Lots of noisy visitors, but I've lost interest in

them. We find a girl who will put our washing through a washing machine, which is good news. A Valdesian pastor, Mario Berutti, comes to join the fast. I play chess with Imco, who plays P - KB3 on the third move, with predictable results. Cagnes tells me that he's pleased that we may get this 'Tam Tam'. He says that neither The Radical Party, nor the DP, nor PDUP have ever succeeded in getting one. He says, 'I'm a union man, I ask for 100 and get 30, I don't ask for 20 and get 2'.

Later we return to the monastery. We have to wait about 10 minutes outside the gate, no-one appears to be there. I wonder if they are doing it intentionally. As soon as we get to the dormitory all the lights fuse. The young padre comes in and tells us not to worry, he'll soon fix it, and he does. They come on, then fuse again. We wonder if the monks are playing games.

Again I don't sleep. My mouth waters a lot and I feel nauseous. I finally drift off at about 6.30 just before the monastery bell starts to clang clang clang! Then Cagnes puts the radio on. Good news! The regional Trade Unions CGIL, CISL & UIL have expressed solidarity with our fast and also with the goal. of the suspension of the missile base.

23 Nov.

In the morning Charles and Imco try and arrange a meeting about how we should break our fast. I get rather irritable, as I don't think that Cagnes ought to be dragged into a meeting of this kind on a day which seems crucial for the action. The idea is dropped for the time being. Then some teenagers come from a local school which has gone on strike in sympathy. A girl says that she will speak for all of them, and that they have heard various rumours about why we are making our fast, but she wants to hear the reasons from us ourselves. It is very refreshing to talk to them. The twenty PCI deputies from Palermo don't show up.

Its a slow day, rather uneventful, something of an anti-climax. Good long piece in l'Unita, though.. At one point four of us go for a walk, Maurice, Suzanne, Josee and me. We spend a pleasant hour in front of the Chiesa Madre. Maurice shows us pictures of his wife and children and of his house in the Community of the Ark. I talk a lot with Suzanne. When we return to the Confesercenti not a lot seems to happen. More noisy visitors, the friendly faces of the contadini. I have one or two interesting conversations. I talk with Charles about the situation, and whether he could stay a little longer if necessary. He says he will think about it. I talk with the girl in the office about the fast and how long we will go on, and about how all of us feel. Although she has seemed rather distant, I realise she is interested and very sympathetic. We discover to our pleasure that all of the shops in Comiso closed for two hours in the morning, except three, and of these one is run by the local secretary of the PSI and one by the right wing 'Committee for the Defence of the Peace'. Also three secondary schools stopped. But it's boring. Nothing happens. Then at 7.30 just as we are preparing to leave the news comes that RAI-TV has agreed to give us

- 1) 25 seconds on the main news.
- 2) a longer piece on 'Telegiorniale
- 3) 15 minutes on channel 2 (PSI rather than DC, but perhaps even better for us).

We are elated and go back to the monastery in good spirits. Josee has finished her fast today, perhaps we will follow her soon. Now we have to continue until we get some kind of confirmatory document, Cagnes thinks perhaps 2 or 3 days.

24 Nov.

In the morning we rather in fairly good spirits to await Cagnes phone call to Pertini. After a while some one comes in and says 'Il Presidente non accetta ricatti' (the President doesn't accept blackmail). Apparently he hadn't said either yes or no; his secretary said "The President is perplexed, he is not used to acting under pressure, he has never in his life yielded to pressure". Cagnes thinks that somebody else must have intervened after the interview with Colajanni.

We have a discussion about what to do. Mainly we feel that it is best not to try and put on more pressure by means of telegrams and letters, but to try and find someone to intervene directly. Cagnes will try and get hold of the President of the Chamber of Deputies, a woman Communist who was a friend of Togliatti. He goes to work. The doctor comes to examine us. He notices that my pulse has slowed down and he listens to my heart. He says my heart is becoming tired and that if I go on there is a danger of some damage to small blood vessels. He thinks I should stop tonight. I say that I will speak with the others and find out how many of us are in the same boat, and I ask the doctor to speak to Cagnes about it. Then we hear that RAI TV are coming at four to make a 'Telegiornale' about us. We have a quick meeting to try and decide whether we all want to speak or whether we should delegate to Cagnes. Before we can finish the TV crew arrive; The interviewer has been talking to Cagnes in the other room and they come in together. They are very efficient. The interviewer is a big tough looking bloke who looks like a boxer and speaks to me in English and Suzanne in German to tell us what is going on. He solves our problem by telling us that since we only have a minute and a half, or at most two minutes he wants Cagnes to speak, since Cagnes knows Italian and will express himself most clearly. Then they will make a slightly longer version for the regional Sicilian news, and some of us will speak. It's fairly tense; he gives Cagnes advice on how best to present his case in 1 1/2 minutes. There are a couple of false starts, but then a very good take, Cagnes eloquent. We all applaud. Then they interview Mario, the pastor, then me because I know some Italian. I manage to give a clear statement which Imco times later at 40 seconds, saying that I am here to show the Sicilians that they are not isolated in their struggle, and that security in the midst of growing nuclear forces is a delusion. The interviewer is pleased, a the crew pack up their gear. Cagnes tells me that the interviewer is on our side in this matter, even though he is a Christian Democrat. He is sure to give us a good introduction when he edits the report.

Then I tell Cagnes about the health problem. He says that the doctor told him that I was fit to continue but that my face was tired. I feel cheered up, and say that I will carry on. Then Edward comes with Umberto Santino. We talk a little. The President of the Confesercenti comes in and tells him how nobody was willing to give us a place so the Confesercenti volunteered. Edward meets Cagnes. He is fasting today in solidarity with us. Someone tells us that six out of eight parliamentary leaders have agreed to meet us, DC, PLI, PCI, PDUP, P Rad, PSD. The Republicans

say they will meet us if we give up our fast, the PSI haven't replied, but then it seems that nobody has really gone and asked them.

Then we go to Edward's meeting. The meeting is good, the questions are short and intelligent, unusual for an Italian political meeting. We have to leave before the end of the questions. In the corridor I meet the doctor. He seems horrified that I haven't stopped, and he says that I absolutely must stop at mid-day tomorrow, or I won't be able to confront the voyage back to London. I decide to follow his advice.

At the monastery we have a talk. Cagnes says he thinks that as we've effectively achieved two out of our three objectives we should simply wait for telegrams of confirmation and then stop. If the fast goes on another four or five days and Pertini still doesn't reply, it would be difficult to explain this failure. Therefore he proposes Saturday morning at about ten as a strategic time to stop. There's some discussion over whether Friday night or Saturday morning are better. I don't take much part in it. I feel it's all over bar the shouting.

POSTSCRIPT

I broke my fast at mid-day the next day, Thursday 25th November. On the main lunchtime news there was a good report on the fast, with Cagnes speaking and a sympathetic introduction. On the evening regional news service the report was repeated, with my intervention attached. The telegram of confirmation from RAI-TV arrived the next day (Friday), and at 6.15 pm the remaining hunger-strikers decided to break their fast. By co-incidence, at 6.20 a telephone call indicated that President Pertini would be disposed to meet them.