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10 DOWNING STREET

6 July 1981

From the Principal Private Secretary

SUBJECT

2.6 AH

✓ Hunter sek

Dear Brian,

Sir Nicholas Henderson called upon the Prime Minister on Friday 3 July primarily to discuss Northern Ireland.

He said that the new "Friends of Ireland" joint congressional committee was a reasonable body by American standards. They had issued a charter in which it was stated that Irish unity could be reached only with the free consent of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland, and this was helpful from our point of view. They were not seeking special status for the hunger strikers but, as he had discovered when he had appeared before them the previous week, they were concerned about the effect of what they saw as the British Government's inflexibility. We should do all we could to keep the committee on our side. More generally, in the propaganda battle in the United States it was essential that our position should not become immobile but that it showed sufficient movement for us to keep the initiative. Looking further ahead, the public perception of the relationship which the Prime Minister established with Dr FitzGerald would be an important factor in the United States.

The Prime Minister outlined the conclusions of the meeting she had held earlier that morning with Ministerial colleagues to discuss the hunger strike and in particular described the current involvement of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace and the possibility of bringing in in the future the International Committee of the Red Cross (Willie Rickett's letter of 3 July to Stephen Boys-Smith).

Sir Nicholas Henderson welcomed these moves. These were precisely the kind of steps that we needed to be seen to be taking to keep American public opinion on our side. It would be very helpful if a member of the Friends of Ireland Committee could be attached to any delegation from the ICRC that visited the Maze. On his return to Washington he would like to be able to say within the next week or so that he had seen the Prime Minister and Mr Atkins to discuss the situation in Northern Ireland. By then it might be possible to refer to the Government's readiness to see both the ICJP and the ICRC involved in attempts to resolve the prison protest. It would be very helpful

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if he could also say that if the Friends of Ireland Committee obtained the ICRC's agreement to a member of the committee being attached as an observer to any team they sent to the Maze, the British Government would not object.

The Prime Minister said that she was generally content for Sir Nicholas Henderson to speak on these lines, subject to the views of her Ministerial colleagues on the proposed association of the Friends of Ireland Committee with any visit by the ICRC to the Maze.

The Prime Minister would be grateful for the advice of Lord Carrington and Mr Atkins on Sir Nicholas Henderson's suggestion that the Friends of Ireland Committee might have an observer with any ICRC team that we invited to visit the Maze.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Halliday (Home Office), Stephen Boys-Smith (Northern Ireland Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Margaret Thatcher.

Brian Fall Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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