

CONFIDENTIAL

London copies by myfox  
IMMEDIATE PULSE.

11/5

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

fa.

Prmie Hunter

(2)

Ans

RECORD OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S DISCUSSION WITH FATHER MAGEE -  
29 APRIL 1981 AT 12.30 PM IN STORMONT CASTLE

Father Magee explained that he came as the personal, not the diplomatic, representative of the Pope. He brought a message to the Secretary of State from the Pope. This was that he came on a mission of peace, goodwill and concern deeply felt by the Pope for strife anywhere, and especially where life was in danger. The Pope had spoken out very clearly against violence, for example at Drogheda, and his condemnation of violence included those engaged in violence against themselves. The Pope wanted to offer help in any way he could to avoid the loss of life which was now in prospect. He had sent Father Magee not as a negotiator but as a personal representative to see whether there was any way of stopping this madness.

2. Father Magee expressed gratitude for the kindly and helpful response he had had since the beginning of his visit. He had had a valuable conversation with Mr Blaker and Mr Alison at London Airport (though he was perturbed that news of his visit had somehow become public - that might have made Sands unwilling to see him).

3. Father Magee gave a detailed account of his visit to Sands.

1.

CONFIDENTIAL

# CONFIDENTIAL

He was surprisingly well, and asked Father Magee to thank the Pope for sending a representative. Father Magee explained to Mr Sands at length the Pope's condemnation of violence, to which Sands responded by explaining his stand. In response to Father Magee's plea to end the hunger strike, Sands responded "do not ask me that". Father Magee emphasized to Sands that this was a personal plea from the Pope, to which Sands responded that the Pope would understand that the people of Northern Ireland are a demotrodden people.

4. Father Magee said he had asked Sands to provide time for possibilities to be explored by ending his hunger strike, if only temporarily - say for three days. Sands said that he would end it immediately for five days provided that certain conditions were satisfied. The Secretary of State intervened to emphasize that while he was willing to hear what Father Magee had undertaken to pass on, he must re-emphasize that his meeting with Father Magee was taking place on the basis that there was no question of any form of negotiation. Father Magee recognised that.

5. Sands' conditions were:

- a) An official from the NIO would visit him to discuss "the whole question"
- b) Two priests should be present as guarantors
- c) Three other prisoners (not the hunger strikers, but presumably the "OCs" within the prison) should be present

Sands emphasized that he was not demanding political status,

**CONFIDENTIAL**

but sought satisfaction on the five demands. If this were achieved, he would not begin his hunger strike again at the end of the five days.

6. Sands said he realized that to set conditions for ending the strike was not the answer Father Magee wanted. But it would serve no useful purpose for Father Magee to come back again without a representative from the NIO.

7. Father Magee asked whether there was any hope of movement on these well-known issues. He thought there was not any great question of principle involved.

8. The Secretary of State emphasised his respect for the Pope's message and his personal respect for the Pope. It was quite clear, however, that Sands was setting conditions. He had explained that there could be no negotiation: that was what Sands was trying to initiate. The Government had no intention of conceding political status but the excellence of the facilities at the Maze Prison and the Government's record of improving them (which they would continue even if Sands died) showed that they had acted compassionately.

humanely and In particular, the Government had responded to responsible criticisms including the suggestions made by the ECHR. Improvement in conditions in the prison had largely overtaken three of the five demands. The response of the prisoners had been to intensify their demands. The Government would not grant demands made in this way, the effect of which would be to grant special status to special people, quite inconsistent with

terrorists. This suggestion had been made by the Pope himself.

CONFIDENTIAL

the Pope's message at Drogheda. The effect of giving in to the demands would be to create a regime within the prison in which a particular group made their own decisions as to what they wore, the nature of their work and whether they worked, and which of their fellow prisoners they would associate with. To concede that would be wrong - and would also provoke a violent reaction within the Province which would threaten innocent lives:

9. Father Magee said he thought that the prisoners would not be inflexible: they wanted evidence of goodwill because promises had been made to them at the end of the last hunger strike and had not been kept.

10. The Secretary of State emphasised to Father Magee that no promises had been made at the end of the last hunger strike. That fact was well known to Sands. The Secretary of State handed to Father Magee documents including notices issued to the prisoners at the end of the last hunger strike which would state the position quite clearly.

11. Father Magee expressed the hope at the end of the meeting that there would be some reaction to the Pope's plea. He thought it likely that he would leave Northern Ireland on the following day unless there were developments which required him to stay. He thought it likely that he would meet Sands' family later in the day, and he had also asked Cardinal O'Flaich to see whether arrangements could be made for Father Magee to visit families of members of the Security Forces who had been killed by terrorists. This suggestion had been made by the Pope himself.

CONFIDENTIAL

London copies by [unclear]  
immediate [unclear]

He would also like to pass on to the three other hunger strikers the Pope's plea to end their fast because the message applied just as much to them as to Sands. The Secretary of State raised no objection to his doing so.

12. At the end of the meeting the Secretary of State explained, and Father Magee accepted, that the Secretary of State could not see Father Magee again because to do so would risk creating the impression that some form of negotiation was going on. There was no question of negotiation and the Secretary of State would need to continue to make that quite clear.

Rafferty

R A HARRINGTON  
Private Secretary  
29 April 1981

- cc. PS/SJS B+L - m
- PS/M. Alison B+L - m
- PS/PUS B+L - m
- Mr Blalock
- Mr Marshall - m
- Mr Wyatt
- Mr Gilliland
- Mr Buxton - m
- Mr Lawson
- Mr Clatterwick

CONFIDENTIAL