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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
GREAT GEORGE STREET,  
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

*ms*

Michael Alexander Esq  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON SW1

21 July 1981

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*Peer Michael*

*Prime Minister*

*ms*

THE MAZE HUNGER STRIKE

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to send you this summary of events since the Prime Minister discussed the situation about the Maze hunger strike with him on the evening of 18 July.

2. The Secretary of State decided that evening that, since the channel had already been warned that a substantive message was on the way, it would be right to send down what was in essence the message sent on 7 July. The form in which the message finally went is explained in our tels nos MISC 001/003 of 19 July to Ottawa. The fuller words about clothes - the need for new prison rules, the specific statement that paramilitary type clothes would not be allowed - were inserted mainly with the Protestant community in mind. We know what "subject to the Governor's approval" means, but suspicious Loyalists would say that the Governor is merely an NIO official (which is true) and will do whatever he is told. So the detail would have been an important safeguard.

3. Although the channel was very free with his own advice, he had nothing acceptable to say about the attitude of the Provisionals and at about 19.00 hours on 20 July the Secretary of State gave instructions that the channel should be closed. The use of the channel has ensured that the Provisionals have been left in no doubt that our public statements are our true position, and not a negotiating gambit. This is likely to be a source of strength to us in coming weeks. The channel has also been a source of additional intelligence about the Provisionals' attitude which we could not get in any other way.

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4. While the channel was open there were other important developments. A Press statement from Republican sources which was said to be issued "from the PRO-H Blocks" on 18 July asked the International Committee of the Red Cross to withdraw and called on Britain "to initiate direct negotiations with the prisoners on achieving a settlement of our demands". The Secretary of State decided to issue a firm re-statement of our basic position without making a specific rejoinder to this demand (copy attached). During the evening of 19 July McFarlane, the Provisionals' "O/C", asked to see the Governor. He said that unless a Government official was prepared to negotiate there was no point in sending anyone in to clarify. If the official came in, the hunger strikers would only meet him as a group and with McFarlane present. This statement by McFarlane was reported to Dublin with instructions that it should be conveyed to the Taoiseach. At midnight on 19 July, an official from the Taoiseach's office conveyed, on instructions, a friendly if unrealistic message from Dr Fitzgerald saying that he appreciated the problems we were having with McFarlane but wondered whether we could persuade the prisoners to overrule him. He wished NIO the best of luck.

5. On Monday evening, 20 July, the parish priest of Lynch, one of the hunger strikers, told us that Lynch and Doherty's relatives wished an official to clarify the Government's position to Lynch and Doherty respectively on the same basis as before - ie without McFarlane present. Two officials went to the prison early this morning and initially met the relatives at their request. The senior officials then spoke individually to the five hunger strikers who are in the hospital. Each made it clear that they did not want to seek clarification unless McFarlane were present. (Lynch had indicated to the prison staff before the officials arrived that he would not insist on this. He appears to have been persuaded by one of his brothers to change his mind.) The official told the relatives and the hunger strikers that he was disappointed at their response and said he was willing to return at any time. The Dublin Embassy have been told about this visit.

6. There has been a marked slowing down in the deterioration of the two hunger strikers now nearing death. Doherty is expected to last at least another 48 hours and Lynch a little longer. The doctors find this puzzling but previous cases have been similarly unpredictable and there is no medical evidence that the prisoners have been fed anything. Their deaths will give rise to renewed disturbances on the streets, especially in the case of Doherty, who comes from West Belfast as well as being a member of the Dail. But the scale of such disturbances has declined since Sands' death in May and the security forces remain confident that they can contain them. We must not rule out the possibility, however, that PIRA will try to mount a "spectacular" incident associated with the deaths. HM Ambassador in Dublin has repeatedly warned us that the effect of Doherty's death on opinion in the Republic is likely to be severe.

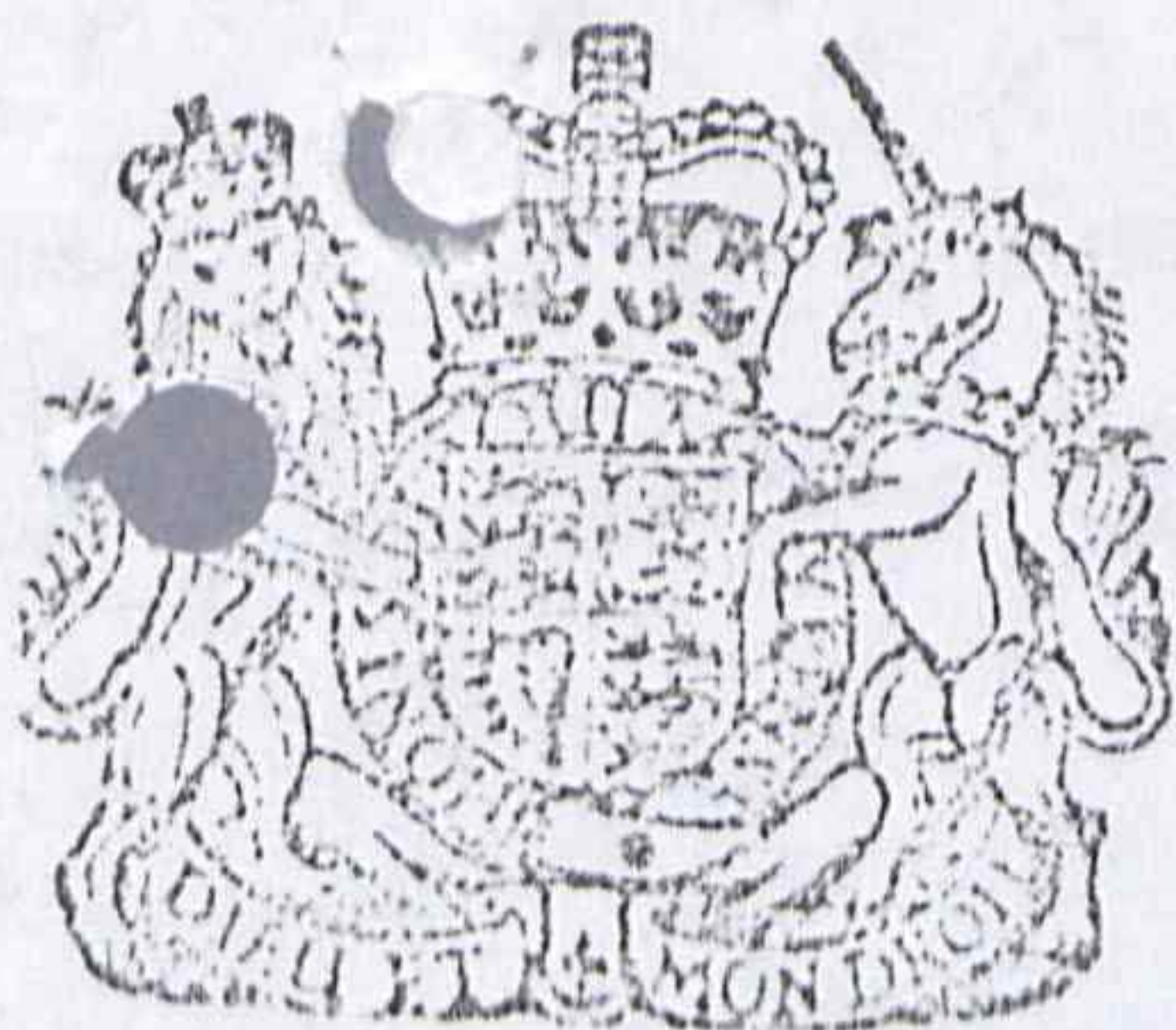
7. In summary therefore we have satisfied ourselves through the channel that the Provisionals are not prepared to accept our position about prison conditions; we have a clear acknowledgement from McFarlane (which we are already making use of) that the hunger strikers have no power to give up; and we have sent an official in to clarify our position to the hunger strikers and they have said that they do not wish to listen.

8. The Secretary of State considers that we have a firm position on which to rest and he is giving urgent consideration to the ways in which we can get the maximum benefit from it.

9. I am sending copies of this letter to John Halliday (Home Office), Roderic Lyne and Adam Wood (FCO) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Mans,  
Stephens*

S W BOYS SMITH



# Northern Ireland Information Service

Stormont Castle,  
Belfast BT4 3ST  
Telephone Belfast 63011  
Telex 74163: 74250: 74272

Great George Street,  
London SW1P 3AJ  
Telephone 01-233-4626  
Telex 1918889

Ulster Office,  
11 Berkeley Street, London W1  
Telephone 01-493-0601  
Telex 21839

19 July 1981

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP, issued the following statement today, Sunday, 19 July, 1981:-

1. The Government is not prepared to negotiate terms for an end to the hunger-strike with the protesting prisoners at the Maze prison.
2. What the Government remains prepared to do is to clarify to the hunger-strikers any doubts they may still have about what will happen when the protest ends.
3. The Government's statement of 8 July makes clear its firm intention to develop further the prison regime for all prisoners after the protest ends and indicates the limits to that development.
4. The International Committee of the Red Cross is currently investigating prison conditions in Northern Ireland on a humanitarian basis.