

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

MF

Mr. Nally rang up at 4.30 pm this afternoon with a further message from the Taoiseach. The Taoiseach has been discussing matters with a considerable number of people over the last day or two, and this message represents a considered view and suggestion in the light of these discussions.

2. The message is as follows:-

- (i) There is now a need for a major serious effort to resolve the crisis in Northern Ireland prisons before further hunger strikers die and before 12th July.
- (ii) The prisoners alone will have the final voice in deciding whether the crisis is resolved: not their families nor anyone outside the prisons.
- (iii) Any discussions should be between a nominee of the prisoners and a high level representative of Her Majesty's Government. In order to avoid direct contact perhaps this could best be done by using as an intermediary one of those who are regular visitors to the prison. Arrangements of this kind would have a very fair chance of a successful result.
- (iv) Though the prisoners are insisting on their five demands, there is in fact room for manoeuvre. It is suggested that we should put on the table a document restating, on the lines of the document of 18th December, the conditions now available to conforming prisoners.
- (v) Any settlement need not be implemented immediately, but could be phased in over a period of, say, 6 months. In that event there would need to be guarantors of implementation. When I asked Mr. Nally what that meant, he shuffled and began to withdraw. He said that it might well be ^{that} any agreement would be self-implementing and would not need guarantors.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

(vi) There is now a movement in favour of a settlement, and a settlement could be of a final nature: this is not "salami tactics".

3. Mr. Nally went on to say that, in view of the political events to occur in Dublin next week, the Taoiseach would like an early response to this message: tomorrow if at all possible. From his point of view it would be sufficient, even if the response only said that you had received his message and were seriously considering it.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I have given an advance notice of the message to Sir Kenneth Stowe and have asked him for urgent advice about a reply. His first reaction was that the nature of the message suggested a close contact between the Taoiseach and elements in the PIRA. It seems possible that the object of the exercise is to intensify the pressure, to see whether there is any possibility of movement and a "settlement" before the hunger strike deaths begin again. Though the PIRA have gained in propaganda terms up to now, they must be apprehensive lest, if the succession of deaths is resumed, public opinion could swing against them and they might lose what they have gained.

REA

(Robert Armstrong)

25th June, 1981