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FM DUBLIN 061010Z AU 1981

TO IMMEDIATE F C O (DESKBY 061200Z)

TELEGRAM NUMBER 282 OF 06 AUG

AND TO IMMEDIATE N I O (BELFAST)

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON AND UKMIS NEW YORK

MY TELNO 281 : HUNGER STRIKE

1. MR KELLY'S REMARKS SHOW HOW REALLY WORRIED THE IRISH GOVERNMENT ARE ABOUT THE HUNGER STRIKE AND THEIR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH THE SECURITY AND OTHER SIDE EFFECTS. FROM MY TALK WITH THE P U S IN THE N I O YESTERDAY I UNDERSTAND THE UNDESIRABILITY OF MAKING ANY NEW MOVE JUST AT THE PRESENT MOMENT. BUT IN VIEW OF MR KELLY'S APPROACH TO US I HOPE WE WILL NOT DELAY TOO LONG BEFORE MAKING A MOVE OF SOME KIND. FRANKLY TO DO NOTHING UNTIL AFTER THE FERMANAGH BY-ELECTION WOULD PUT US IN A VERY BAD POSTURE WITH THE IRISH GOVERNMENT. AND WHATEVER WE MAY THINK OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S SUGGESTION ABOUT IMPLEMENTING PRISON REFORMS BEFORE THE HUNGER STRIKE ENDS WE MUST TRY AND GIVE MR KELLY SYMPATHETIC AND REASONED REPLY SOON WHICH CAN BE MADE PUBLIC.

2. AS I SAID TO THE LORD PRIVY SEAL AND THE P U S N I O, A CONTINUATION OF THE HUNGER STRIKE FOR MORE THAN ABOUT ANOTHER SIX WEEKS COULD CAUSE SERIOUS PARLIAMENTARY CONSEQUENCES HERE. WE HAVE HEARD THAT THE PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN OR H BLOCK COMMITTEE MIGHT NOT CONTEST THE CAVAN-MONAGHAN BY-ELECTION SO AS NOT TO SPLIT THE FIANNA FAIL VOTE. ASSUMING FIANNA FAIL WON THE SEAT, AGNEW, THE H BLOCK PRISONER WHO IS A MEMBER IN THE LOUTH CONSTITUENCY, WOULD BE TOLD TO RESIGN AND IN THE SUBSEQUENT BY-ELECTION FIANNA FAIL WOULD GAIN ANOTHER SEAT. THIS WOULD MEAN

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A TIE IN SEATS IN THE DAIL BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY MEAN A GENERAL ELECTION. THE H-BLOCK COMMITTEE COULD THEN BE EXPECTED TO PUT UP CANDIDATES IN ALL CONSTITUENCIES , THE ISSUE WOULD BE CENTRAL IN THE ELECTION AND JUDGING BY THEIR PREVIOUS PERFORMANCE THE H -BLOCKERS MIGHT WELL GAIN SEVEN OR EIGHT SEATS . THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD BE BOUND TO TAKE THEIR VIEWS INTO ACCOUNT, ASSUMING THE H-BLOCK CANDIDATES TOOK THEIR SEATS, AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR US COULD BE VERY SERIOUS.

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FROM DUBLIN 051710Z AUGUST 1981  
TO IMMEDIATE F C O  
TELEGRAM NUMBER 281 OF 05 AUGUST.  
AND TO IMMEDIATE N I O BELFAST  
INFO SAVING WASHINGTON

PS TO THE PM.  
NO10 DOWNING STREET.

HUNGER STRIKE.

FROM TATHAM.

1. IN THE AMBASSADOR'S ABSENCE IN LONDON, I WAS SUMMONED BY MR JOHN KELLY, ACTING MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THIS AFTERNOON.

2. MR KELLY SAID THAT THE IRISH GOVERNMENT FELT THAT HMG DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CURRENT H-BLOCKS CRISIS AS IT APPEARED TO THEM. IT WAS NOT SIMPLY A DIFFERENCE OF APPRECIATION. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT BELIEVED THE STRIKE WOULD ONLY BENEFIT THE IRA, THAT IT WOULD NOT FIZZLE OUT, AND THAT ON THE PRESENT SHOWING IT WOULD BE SEEN TO HAVE BEEN A SUCCESS FOR THE EXTREMISTS. HE PERSONALLY THOUGHT THAT THE APPEARANCE OF A FORMERLY MODERATE FIANNA FAIL DEPUTY (MR NIALL ANDREWS) AT DOHERTY'S FUNERAL WAS A DEPRESSING SIGN OF THE WAY THINGS WERE GOING. IF HMG BELIEVED THE WAVERING AMONG TWO FAMILIES (QUINN'S AND LYNCH'S) WAS THE START OF A TREND, THEY WERE WRONG; THESE TWO HAD ALWAYS BEEN THE WEAK LINKS. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT BELIEVED THERE WAS A LONG QUEUE OF VOLUNTEERS TO TAKE THEIR PLACE IN THE STRIKE.

3. MR KELLY COMPLAINED BRIEFLY THAT YESTERDAY'S EDITORIALS IN THE TIMES AND THE DAILY TELEGRAPH (FOR WHICH HE RECOGNISED HMG WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE) UNDERSTATED THE DEPTH OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN. HE BELIEVED THAT OUR POLICY, WHILE IT MIGHT BE CONSTANT WITH FIRM GOVERNMENT, WAS HOSTILE TO WHAT MUST BE OUR LONG TERM AIMS, TO REDUCE TENSION AND TO CREATE CONDITIONS IN WHICH A SOLUTION WAS POSSIBLE.

4. HE SAID THE IRISH GOVERNMENT HAD A CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTION. MR ALISON HAD SAID AT THE BEGINNING OF JULY THAT, IF THE STRIKE ENDED, "AN ADVANCE" IN THE PRISON REGIME WAS POSSIBLE. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT PROPOSED THAT THIS ADVANCE SHOULD BE PUT INTO EFFECT NOW FOR CONFORMING PRISONERS. THIS WOULD ENABLE HMG TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR GOOD FAITH AND SHORT-CIRCUIT PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE PRISONERS. NO FACE OR GROUND NEED BE LOST. HE ADDED THAT THIS SUGGESTION DID NOT DETRACT FROM THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S BROADER VIEW THAT AN OPPORTUNITY HAD BEEN LOST AT THE START OF JULY IN THE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN MR ALISON AND THE ICJP. THEY BELIEVE THAT A SMALL DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY THEN COULD HAVE SOLVED THE PROBLEM.

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5. FINALLY, MR KELLY REVERTED TO THE DESTABILISING EFFECT WHICH THE HUNGER STRIKE HAD HAD IN THE REPUBLIC. THE DIMENSIONS OF DISORDER HAD EXPANDED, THERE HAD BEEN ATTACKS ON POLICE STATIONS AND SHOTS HAD BEEN FIRED AT REPUBLICAN GATHERINGS. THE REPUBLIC'S SECURITY FORCES WERE AT FULL STRETCH AND, ALTHOUGH THEIR COMMITMENT TO MAINTAIN SECURITY WAS UNDIMINISHED, THERE WERE LIMITS TO WHAT THEY COULD DO IF THE PRESENT SITUATION CONTINUED.

6. MR KELLY SAID THAT THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD SUMMONED ME AND MADE THE SUGGESTION IN MY PARA. 4 ABOVE WOULD SHORTLY BE MADE PUBLIC.

7. IN REPLY I UNDERTOOK TO PASS ON THIS MESSAGE TO LONDON BUT SAID THAT HMG WERE DEALING WITH AN UNSCRUPULOUS ADVERSARY. IF WE MADE THE CONCESSION HE SUGGESTED, IT COULD SIMPLY BE POCKETED AND THE STRIKE CONTINUE. OUR AIM WAS TO END THE PROTEST IN THE PRISONS AND ANY CLARIFICATION OF OUR VIEWS SHOULD BE CALCULATED TO ACHIEVE THAT END. AT THE MOMENT, WE SIMPLY DID NOT BELIEVE THE IRA WANTED A SOLUTION. WE COULD CLARIFY SOME POINTS BUT IF WE DID NOT THEREBY END THE STRIKE WE AND THE IRISH WOULD BE MUCH WORSE OFF. MR KELLY SAID HE APPRECIATED THIS BUT HE THOUGHT THE MOST PRESSING NEED WAS TO END THE PRESENT CRISIS AT ONCE.

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F C O PLEASE PASS SAVING TO WASHINGTON.

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