

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

*Briefing seen by*



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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE *Pr*

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13 May 1981

*Dear Michael,*

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR JOHN HUME MEP, 13 MAY.

... I enclose a brief for the Prime Minister's meeting with John Hume this evening.

Mr Hume asked the NIO at the end of last week if we would facilitate a meeting between him and the Prime Minister. He then told the press that he had sought such a meeting. On the Secretary of State's instructions, Roy Harrington told him on 11 May that by leaking his request he had put us in a false position which he would have to regularise by approaching you direct. This he did.

Mr Hume told us that he wanted to discuss with the Prime Minister his "two points" for ending the hunger strike. (These are explained in the background attached to the brief). We told him firmly that a discussion on these lines with the Prime Minister would serve no useful purpose. He then proposed a general talk, citing the Prime Minister's invitation to him during her visit here in March to come to see her whenever he was worried about the situation in the Province. It is on this basis that the meeting is to take place.

The Secretary of State hopes that it will be possible for Ministers to have a general discussion very soon on the way ahead in Northern Ireland, embracing the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies as well as the hunger strike itself. We hope that in the meantime the Prime Minister will find the line in the speaking notes attached acceptable.

On the general situation in the Province, you will have a copy of the minute to the Prime Minister on 12 May.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely*  
*M W Hopkins*

M W HOPKINS

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## BRIEF FOR PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR JOHN HUME, MEP

### Points to Make

#### Hunger Strike

1. We cannot concede a special status for prisoners convicted of terrorist offences. To do so would give a boost to Provisional recruiting, risk a severe Protestant reaction and destroy the essential position that they are criminals, not prisoners of war.
2. It is neither accurate nor helpful to say that if only the Government could "be flexible", the hunger strike issue could be solved. The Provisionals stated at the beginning and end of Sands' fast, and have restated since, that they want all five demands. This to everyone can only mean a special, political status. The Provisionals have coldly decided that the deaths of Sands and colleagues are necessary for their ends. It is they who are inflexible, not the Government.
3. We have shown flexibility in the changes introduced last year, in our attempts to de-escalate the dirty protest in January, and in our response to the ending of the dirty protest in March (when in spite of the fact that this move was explicitly in support of the hunger strike, we moved prisoners as quickly as possible into clean cells, cut the rate they lose remission by half, and started to issue furniture when they asked for it - this notwithstanding the fact that some of the same prisoners did so much damage last January). We allowed the 3 Dublin MEPs (Blaney, de Valera and O'Connell) the ECHR representatives, the Pope's representative and the Labour Party spokesman (Mr Concannon) to visit the Maze in the hope that they could find some way to persuade Sands to come to a solution. I hope the hunger strikers will even now respond to the Pope's plea.

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4. We are publicly committed to maintaining an enlightened and humanitarian regime for all prisoners in Northern Ireland, and to improving the regime where there are good grounds for so doing and where the resources and the need for security permit. But what the protesters want is a special separate regime which gives them a differentiated status.

5. We are prepared, as always, to listen to representations from responsible quarters on all aspects of the environment for all conforming prisoners. We are prepared to give the ECHR all facilities (though we cannot initiate a complaint against ourselves) and told them so before they responded to Sands' complaint.

Mr Hume's Own Proposals.

6. I know that you put forward two ideas last December [that prisoners could if they wished buy the prison issue clothing so as to be able to call it their own, and that they should be allowed to move freely within their wings] but it is quite clear from what has happened since then that these changes - even if they were acceptable in their own right and there are in fact objections to both - would not have provided an enduring solution to the protests. On the contrary, by conceding part of what is on demand the Government might well be, and be seen to be, encouraging further coercion. Events in 1972 (introduction of special category) showed that political status encourages support for terrorism.

Reaction in Nationalists Areas.

7. HMG has been much heartened by the calls of many responsible community leaders to calm, restraint and understanding. The security forces enjoy the full confidence of the Government in their handling of the violence there has been. Nevertheless welcome Mr Hume's own appreciation of the situation. How might the Catholic community react to further hunger strike deaths? Have the issues been made clear: and if not are there better ways of doing so?

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The Way Forward.

8. We are thinking carefully how to proceed. We want to be able to offer a political way forward, not only in order to demonstrate the negative nature of the hunger strike, but to encourage people in the Province to think constructively about the future and to choose the peaceful and democratic option. The local elections on 20 May and the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies should help this process.

Anglo-Irish Joint Studies.

9. Officials are working on lines agreed between Mr Haughey and myself in December. It is important for all of us in the UK to develop our friendship with the Republic not only because of our mutual concern over Northern Ireland, but because we have very many bilateral interests in common.

Local Elections (defensive).

10. To postpone the local elections on 20 May would be a surrender to the Provisionals. It would put off the next step in the political process, which we want to restart. And it would make the SDLP appear the tools of the Government, which Mr Hume cannot want.



BACKGROUND NOTES:

Hunger Strike

1. The talking points are largely self-explanatory. Mr Hume is likely to press the Prime Minister to make some concession to the hunger strikers, in order to encourage a solution. Last weekend, the press reported him as saying that if the "own clothes" and "free association" issues could be resolved, then the hunger strike could be brought to an end.
2. The protesters have, however, made it clear, time and time again, that the central issue is not about prison conditions but about political status. The Government has introduced improvements in the kind of matters - clothing, letters and parcels, remission - which are alleged by some to be what the hunger strikers are concerned about. Despite this, the five demands - which would involve a severe loss of control by the prison authorities and a prisoner-of-war type regime appropriate to political status - still stand. They are the rights to:-
  - (a) free association (ie to mingle freely in the prison wings or blocks with prisoners of their own choosing);
  - (b) own clothing;
  - (c) avoid prison work;
  - (d) increased visits and letters privileges;
  - (e) full restoration of lost remission.
3. These claims cannot be conceded since it is not a matter of flexibility but a matter of principle. This cannot be fudged.
4. Sands died on 5 May, on the sixty-sixth day of his hunger strike. Francis Hughes died yesterday: McCreesh and O'Hara will be on their fifty-third day. They should survive until later next week.



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Local Elections

5. Individual members of the SDLP (including Mr Hume) were complaining bitterly last week that if the local elections were to go ahead as planned on 20 May, their vote (and that of the moderate Unionist parties) would suffer: increased polarisation between the communities would favour independent "green" Republicans and Mr Paisley's DUP. The arguments against such a postponement are briefly set out in the speaking notes. NIO have considered the question and are firmly in favour of going ahead. There are signs that this view is now beginning to prevail in the SDLP too, though Mr Hume may conceivably raise the point.

6. Mr Hume may not know, but we do, that PSF have put up some candidates of their own under cover of the other labels.

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