Jan Maria

UNCLASSIFIED

L. M. 1. 8851 -

OO UKREP BRUSSELS (DESKBY 040800Z)

GRS 433

UNCLASSIFIED

DESKBY 040800Z

FM FCO 011951Z MAY

TO IMMEDIATE UKREP BRUSSELS

TELEGRAM NUMBER 374 OF 1 MAY

INFO IMMEDIATE UKDEL STRASBOURG AND LUXEMBOURG

YOUR TELNO 1477: MESSAGE FROM EP SOCIALIST GROUP TO PRIME MINISTER

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF REPLY TO GO FROM SIR M BUTLER TO M. GLINNE. PLEASE DELIVER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

BEGINS:

THE PRIME MINISTER HAS ASKED ME TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR MESSAGE THAT YOU SENT HER ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIALIST GROUP OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, ABOUT THE CURRENT HUNGER-STRIKE IN THE MAZE PRISON IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

'SHE WISHES TO ASSURE YOU THAT SHE IS DEEPLY CONCERNED WITH THE ISSUE AND WITH THE HEIGHTENED TENSIONS THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY THAT IT HAS BROUGHT ABOUT. SHE RECOGNISES THAT YOUR ANXIETY IS TO SAVE LIFE AND NOT TO SACRIFICE ANY PRINCIPLE.

'NEVERTHELESS THE HUNGER STRIKE IS IN SUPPORT OF A DEMAND FOR THE GRANTING OF POLITICAL STATUS, WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAS REJECTED, AS HAS THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, AND WHICH IS REGARDED THROUGHOUT THE UNITED KINGDOM AS INSUPPORTABLE. THE PROTESTING PRISONERS HAVE REPEATEDLY ASSERTED THAT THEIR CAMPAIGN IS AIMED AT POLITICAL STATUS. THIS CAMPAIGN SEEKS TO SECURE SPECIFIC CHANGES WHICH WILL RESULT IN A REGIME OF A KIND APPROPRIATE TO THEM AS PRISONERS OF WAR. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON THE PRISONERS' DEMANDS HAS BEEN REPEATEDLY MADE CLEAR SINCE THE BEGINNING LAST OCTOBER OF THE FIRST HUNGER-STRIKE. THE ISSUES ARE NO DIFFERENT TODAY.

'YOU SUGGEST THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SEND A REPRESENT-ATIVE TO TALK TO MR SANDS IN THE PRISON. THIS WAS DONE LAST DECEMBER IN ORDER THAT THE HUNGER-STRIKERS SHOULD BE IN NO DOUBT

ABOUT WHAT IS AVAILABLE UNDER THE EXISTING PRISON REGIME. SINCE THEN THE GREATEST PAINS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO MAKE THE PROTESTING PRISONERS AWARE OF THE FACTS.

'I AM AFRAID THEREFORE THAT NO USEFUL PURPOSE WOULD BE
SERVED BY SUCH A VISIT. THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT PREPARED TO
NEGOTIATE WITH THE PRISONERS. TO DO SO WOULD BE TO ABANDON
FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES IN THE FACE OF THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE.
THE GOVERNMENT IS CONVINCED THAT THAT WOULD LEAD DIRECTLY TO
GREATER VIOLENCE. IT INTENDS THEREFORE TO STAND FIRM ON THE
EXISTING POSITION. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S
INTENTION TO MAINTAIN AND, WHERE PRACTICABLE, IMPROVE THE HIGH
STANDARDS ALREADY ACHIEVED IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON REGIME.
IT WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE VIEWS OF RESPONSIBLE
PEOPLE AND BODIES WHO HAVE HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS AT HEART.
BY ITS ACTIONS LAST YEAR AND IN THE COURSE OF THE TWO HUNGERSTRIKES, IT HAS SHOWN ITS WILLINGNESS TO DO THIS.' ENDS.

CARRINGTON

ECD (2)

NORTHERN IRELAND LIMITED · PS/MR HURD RID PS/MR RIDLEY NAD PS/MR BLAKER INFORMATION D PS/PUS WED SIR A ACLAND MAED CHIEF CLERK NEWS D MR ADAMS SECURITY D MR BULLARD PUSD MR FERGUSSON PS LORD N G LENNOX PS/IPS ECD (I)

ADDITIONAL DISTN. NORTHERN IRELAND



COMPINITION

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SWIP 3AJ

30 April 1981

Michael Alexander Esq 10 Downing Street London SW1

Reply sent.

Den Think

MAZE HUNGER STRIKE: MESSAGE FROM SOCIALIST GROUP OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

You will have seen the message to the Prime Minister from the Socialist Group, in UK Rep Brussels telegram no. 1477 of 29 April to FCO. It calls for the Prime Minister's immediate intervention in the crisis, and suggests that a representative should be sent to talk to Sands in an effort to break the deadlock.

During the last hunger strike, when Neil Blaney and others sought to move an urgent debate in the European Parliament, the Socialist Group led by Ernest Glinne were decisive in ensuring the defeat of the procedural motion. A similar move is on foot today, and (partly because John Hume's position is very different from what it was) it is very unlikely that the group will take the same forthright attitude when the procedural motion is debated early next week, especially if Sands should by then have died.

However, this makes it the more important that the Group should have a reasoned explanation of the Government's position, and why their suggestion would inevitably (and contrary to what they assert) involve a sacrifice of principle. It would obviously be best if a message could be delivered in reply while Sands remains alive.

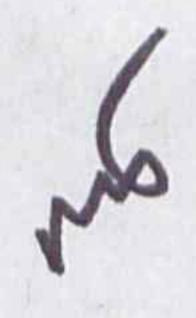
I attach a draft message which Sir Michael Butler might transmit to M. Glinne on the Prime Minister's behalf. He might think it more tactful to omit the clause in square brackets.

I am copying this to Francis Richards in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Subject to the Prime Minister's and Lord Privy Seal's agreement, I hope that the message can be sent to UK Rep Brussels soon.

R A HARRINGTON



Message from Sir Michael Butler, UK Rep, to M Ernest Glinne, Chairman of Socialist Group, European Parliament



The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for the message that you sent her on behalf of the Socialist Group of the European Parliament, about the current hunger-strike in the Maze Prison in Northern Ireland.

She wishes to assure you that she is deeply concerned with the issue and with the heightened tensions throughout the community that it has brought about. She recognises that your anxiety is to save life and not to sacrifice any principle.

Nevertheless the hunger-strike is in support of a demand for the granting of political status, which the Government has rejected, as has the European Commission on Human Rights, and which is generally regarded throughout the United Kingdom as insupportable. The protesting prisoners have repeatedly asserted that their campaign is aimed at political status. This campaign seeks to secure specific changes which will result in a regime of a kind appropriate to them as prisoners of war. The Government's position on the prisoners' demands has been repeatedly made clear since the beginning last October of the first hunger-strike. — which the European Parliament decided was not cause for an urgent debate—. The issues are no different today.

You suggest that the Government should send a representative to talk to Mr Sands in the prison. This was done last December in order that the hunger-strikers should be in no doubt about what is available under the existing prison regime. Since then the greatest pains have been taken to make the protesting prisoners aware of the facts.

I am a paid therefore that

Overnment were prepared to negotiate with the prisoners. But to do that would be to abandon sound principles of prison administration in the face of the threat of violence.

The Government is convinced that that would lead directly to greater violence.

It is therefore right to stand firm on the existing position, both on grounds of practical expediency and of principle. This is of course consistent with the Government's intention to maintain and, where practicable, improve the high



standards already achieved in the Northern Ireland prison regime. It will continue to take account of the views of responsible people and bodies who have humanitarian considerations at heart. By its actions last year and in the course of the two hunger-strikes, it has shown its willingness to do this.