

*below: Hunger Strike
pg 3*

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Sands*

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OO UKREP BRUSSELS (DESKBY 040800Z)
GRS 433
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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

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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 HUNGER-STRIKES, IT HAS SHOWN ITS WILLINGNESS TO DO THIS.' ENDS.

CARRINGTON

NORTHERN IRELAND LIMITED
RID PS/MR HURD
NAD PS/MR RIDLEY
INFORMATION D PS/MR BLAKER
WED PS/PUS
MAED SIR A ACLAND
NEWS D CHIEF CLERK
SECURITY D MR ADAMS
PUSD MR BULLARD
PS MR FERGUSSON
PS/LPS LORD N G LENNOX
MR BRAITHWAITE
ECD (1)
ECD (2)

ADDITIONAL DISTN.
NORTHERN IRELAND

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



CONFIDENTIAL

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

30th April 1981

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Reply sent.

Dear Michael,

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.

*Yours sincerely,
R A Harrington*

R A HARRINGTON

CONFIDENTIAL

E.R.

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 afraid therefore that

[No useful purpose could therefore be served by such a visit, unless the Government were prepared to negotiate with the prisoners. But to do that would be to abandon ~~sound~~ ^{fundamental} 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~~ ^{intends} 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

E.R.

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.