

e.c. Martin



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

2 July 1981

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Dear Brian,

TELEPHONE CALL FROM DR GARRET FITZGERALD

Dr Garret FitzGerald, the new Taoiseach, telephoned the Prime Minister at 1800 yesterday evening. The line over which the conversation took place was particularly bad, and I am afraid that there were periods when Dr FitzGerald was inaudible, but I think that I have pieced together the essentials of what he had to say.

After thanking the Prime Minister for her message of congratulations on his appointment as Taoiseach, Dr FitzGerald said that he was looking forward to co-operating with the Prime Minister and to continuing the work which she had started with his predecessor. Nothing but good could come from this process. The Prime Minister said that there were now regular bilateral meetings between her and the Taoiseach and the next one was due to take place in London. On the assumption that Dr FitzGerald wished to continue with them, she was ready to try and find a convenient time for the next meeting, but she had to warn him that the present moment was a very busy time for her, as it was no doubt for him. Dr FitzGerald replied that he was anxious to move on to the next bilateral meeting as soon as appropriate and as soon as it was convenient. He had to pick up the reins in Dublin. But he hoped that his office and the Prime Minister's could agree upon a date for a meeting. In the meantime he was anxious to have an early word with the Prime Minister on one particular matter, the H Block situation. He had seen Sir Leonard Figg about it earlier in the day, and there were two points he wished to put to the Prime Minister. First, speed was very important. The hunger strike which had ended last December had been resolved at a very late stage indeed, and he did not believe that this way of proceeding could operate again on this occasion. The work which had been done already should be pushed ahead. He did not know the details of the contacts between the Northern Ireland Office and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, but he believed that the Commission were working along useful lines. The second point that he wanted to make was that the Commission should have the opportunity to explain to the prisoners in the Maze what was proposed so that there was

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no misunderstanding. He hoped that if the Commission could be allowed access to the Maze, the prisoners would end their protest on the basis of various arrangements which he believed were desirable in order to improve their conditions.

The Prime Minister said that Mr Alison had already met the Commission and had had a useful exchange of views with them. He could certainly have another meeting with them, although he probably would not be able to do that in the next twenty-four hours since he would almost certainly be attending an important debate on Northern Ireland in the House of Commons the following day. Nor could she agree that the Commission should be allowed to meet the prisoners. Prisoners were allowed to see only their relatives, their solicitors and their priests. If the Commission were given access to them, it would look as though they were acting as intermediaries in a negotiation between the British Government and the prisoners, and this was something which she could not accept. It remained her earnest hope that the hunger strikers would end their protest, and she thought that the statement issued by Mr Atkins the previous day might be sufficient to encourage the families of the prisoners and the clergy to try to persuade the hunger strikers to end their protest.

Dr FitzGerald said that he saw the difficulty of letting the Commission have access to the prisoners, but he hoped that the Prime Minister would be prepared to consider further her position on his request. Another meeting between Mr Alison and the Commission would be very helpful but it would need to be held very quickly. Friday might be too late: he was concerned about the deteriorating condition of the hunger striker McDonnell. He wondered whether there was any possibility of Mr Alison meeting the Commission later that evening.

The Prime Minister said that she did not believe that Mr Alison should rush into a meeting as quickly as that. She would, however, see how soon a meeting could be arranged but she had to repeat that she thought that Friday morning would be reasonable. She reiterated her hope that everybody would urge all the prisoners on hunger strike to end their protest, for to continue it would be a futile waste of their own lives.

Dr FitzGerald concluded by saying that the Prime Minister did not have to convince him of that. He was grateful to her for agreeing that Mr Alison should meet the Commission again as soon as possible.

I am sending copies of this letter to Stephen Boys-Smith (Northern Ireland Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

Theresa Whitmore.

Brian Fall Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

etc. Martin.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND DR. GARRETT FITZGERALD ON WEDNESDAY 1 JULY 1981

Prime Minister: Hello, Taoiseach, how are you? and many congratulations.

Dr. Fitzgerald: Thank you very much and I want to thank you for your very kind message.

Prime Minister: Not at all.

Dr. Fitzgerald: And to say how much I look forward to working with you and to the work you started with my predecessor between our two countries ^{nothing but good can come from} (unclear) working together in this respect.

Prime Minister: But we have the regular bilaterals, you know since those days, we have had one in London now, and one in Dublin, and I expect the next one will be in London. And you will continue those?

Dr. Fitzgerald: Of course and we are anxious then to move on to the next one as soon as appropriate and as soon as it is convenient.

Prime Minister: Right our offices can fix up a date that is mutually convenient. You have chosen a terribly busy time but its busy for you as well as for us.

Dr. Fitzgerald: I know well that is something that can be sorted out between our respective people would be the appropriate time and I've got to pick up the reins here a bit.

Prime Minister: Of course you have.

Dr. Fitzgerald: And I was anxious to have words on one particular point - the H Block situation. I did discuss it today with your Ambassador here and there are two points I want, if I might, to put to you we've been in daily contact with the situation - I myself have been in fairly close contact with it even before and the assessment that I have made and supported by others ^{who have been} here is that at this moment ^{speed. i. of great importance}

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what happened in December when at a very late stage the matter was resolved and we all thought and had hoped would not operate in our view on and we are very concerned is still conscious the work^{that} has been done already should be pushed ahead and might lead to things breaking down and the present situation does seem very favourable indeed in view of the . . . work that has been done. I don't know the details but . . . that has been dealing with you bilaterally and I hadn't thought of the details that cropped up between you. But I know that they are along useful lines. And the other point that I wanted to make was that it would be of very great importance that people should have the opportunity to explain what is involved to the prisoners who haven't obviously and suggestion of that should be avoided and if it were possible for them to have access to and it is very important that they should have the opportunity to explain to them what is proposed so there would be no misunderstanding. I believe that this could help to along the lines of the that we all desire. That they end their protest on the basis of the various arrangements which we believe are desirable to improve the conditions of the prisoners. I'm sorry for that very long statement but I wanted to put two points to the and desirability of the at the earliest possible moment rather than access particularly by Hugh ? or somebody else to explain to the people what is involved

Prime Minister: Can I just make two comments, Taoiseach. First as you know Michael Alison has met the Commission before and indeed I think they had a very interesting exchange. We have a debate in the House tomorrow about Northern Ireland, on the emergency regulations and the renewal of the requisite statutes to enable us to continue direct rule, but he can certainly see the Commission again. Michael Alison can certainly see the Commission again and discuss matters with them. I couldn't give consent immediately just like this to the Commission seeing the prisoners. We do have a rule that the prisoners see their relatives, lawyers and priests

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and my initial reaction to what you suggest is to put the Commission in a position where it looks as if they are negotiating would be totally wrong both from their view point and of course we couldn't possibly negotiate. We do in fact, you know Humphrey issued his statement yesterday, and we hoped that that would be sufficient to get people off the hunger strike if we had the goodwill of the relatives and of the clergy. But let me say that certainly Michael Alison can see the Commission again and that at any rate would be a first thing that we could do.

Dr. Fitzgerald: And that could be done very quickly, that would certainly help. And I appreciate the other difficulty. My concern would be whoever goes in to talk to all the prisoners not just to a prisoner who he might be related to and I see your difficulty

Prime Minister: Well I warned you I would do what I said but lets agree that Michael Alison will see the Commission again. It can't I think be until after the debate in the House tomorrow but perhaps it could be, I will see if we can arrange it as early as possible after that.

Dr. Fitzgerald: When does the debate end, Prime Minister.

Prime Minister: The debate tomorrow, about 1000. 1000 tomorrow night - its our annual debate. And it is an important day for Northern Irish affairs and it is our annual debate and of course the Secretary of State - I'm not quite sure whether Michael Alison is winding up but we have most of our Ministers there tomorrow because it is our very important annual debate. But I will certainly see if we could arrange something for Friday.

Dr. Fitzgerald: Well it worries me a little because of the state of the

morning earlier or something like that. I'm sorry to press this but

Prime Minister: Yes well I do think. Taoiseach, its 6.15 on Wednesday night. We have a major debate tomorrow. It does seem to / me to be

me to be reasonable to try to fix it up early on Friday morning. Because you see Michael Alison will have to get over here for the debate tomorrow.

Dr. Fitzgerald: He could have seen them this evening . . .

Prime Minister: I don't think we should dash at it quite like that but he will naturally wish to prepare himself. I will see how early we can arrange, Garrett, but I think early Friday morning is reasonable. But I have not spoken to him, obviously I didn't know of the suggestion.

Dr. Fitzgerald: Yes I understand. But perhaps you can look and see if it is possible. There is just this danger that all that has become possible might no longer ^{be} possible . . .

Prime Minister: I just hope that everyone will try to urge all of the prisoners on hunger strike to come off it because it is a futile waste of their own lives. A futile waste of their own lives.

Dr. Fitzgerald: You don't have to convince me of that, Prime Minister. I'm not new to the subject as you probably know. But . . .

Prime Minister: Yes I know. Everyone is trying to get them off the hunger strike and absolutely I don't wish them to waste their own lives in any way at all. I will get in touch with Michael Alison straightaway.

Dr. Fitzgerald: Thank you very much Prime Minister.

Prime Minister: Thank you for phoning. I look forward to seeing you. Goodbye.