

*Prime Minister*

CONFIDENTIAL *This telegram from Sir Nicholas Henderson reports the meeting with the Friends of Ireland joint Congressional committee which he mentioned when he saw you last Friday. It is worth reading in full, as is the second telegram below which contains the text of a letter from Speaker O'Neill to President Reagan.*

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FM WASHINGTON 241915Z

TO PRIORITY F C O

TELNO 1930 OF 24 JUNE 1981,

INFO NIO BELFAST, NIO LONDON, DUBLIN, BIS NEW YORK,

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NORTHERN IRELAND: MEETING WITH FRIENDS OF IRELAND

1. AT THEIR REQUEST, I HAD A MEETING THIS MORNING WITH THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND, THE NEW GROUP IN CONGRESS WHICH HAS BEEN FORMED TO PROVIDE A FORUM FOR MODERATE IRISH AMERICAN VIEWS ON THE HILL. I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY MARSHALL AND GILLILAND (NIO). THE MEETING WAS CHAIRED BY CONGRESSMAN FOLEY, THE HOUSE MAJORITY WHIP, AND ATTENDED BY SENATOR KENNEDY AND ABOUT 15 OTHER CONGRESSMEN.

2. THE CLEAR AND UNANIMOUS MESSAGE WHICH KENNEDY AND HIS COLLEAGUES WANTED TO CONVEY TO ME WAS THIS. THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND HAD BEEN FORMED IN ORDER TO CONTRIBUTE TO A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM AND TO COUNTER THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EXTREMISTS. THE GROUP WAS FOLLOWING IN THE TRADITION ESTABLISHED BY KENNEDY AND THE OTHER "HORSEMEN" AND HOPED TO BUILD ON THEIR SUCCESS IN COUNTERING AMERICAN SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY FINANCIAL SUPPORT, FOR THE PROVISIONAL IRA.

3. ALL THOSE PRESENT BELIEVED THAT THEIR POSITION WAS BEING SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED BY THE SUCCESSES OF THE PROVISIONAL IRA IN WINNING POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THEIR CAUSE AS A RESULT OF THE HUNGER STRIKE DEATHS. THEY ALL FELT THE PRESSURE OF THIS POLARISATION WITHIN THEIR CONSTITUENCIES. NORAIID, WHICH HAD BEEN A DIMINISHING FORCE, HAD ONCE AGAIN COME TO THE FORE, ECLIPSING EVEN SUCH TROUBLEMAKERS AS THE IRISH NATIONAL CAUCUS. FUND-RAISING FOR THE PROVISIONAL IRA HAD INCREASED DRAMATICALLY AND THE TRUE AIMS OF THE PROVISIONALS HAD BEEN CONCEALED, EVEN FROM THE SOPHISTICATED MEDIA, BY NORAIID'S SUCCESSES IN PRESENTING THE HUNGER STRIKERS AS SUFFERERS IN A HUMANITARIAN CAUSE.

4. KENNEDY AND THE OTHERS ALL SAID THAT THEY DID NOT SUPPORT THE DEMAND FOR POLITICAL STATUS. BUT THEY ALL FOUND IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT BRITAIN WAS SHOWING THE FLEXIBILITY NECESSARY TO AVOID LOSING THE PROPAGANDA WAR. IF THERE WERE MORE HUNGER STRIKE DEATHS, AND PARTICULARLY A SUCCESSION OF WEEKLY DEATHS, PRESSURES ON MODERATE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS BOTH TO SUPPORT THE AIMS OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS AND TO BRING PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, WOULD BECOME ENORMOUS. WAS THERE, THEY ASKED, NO WAY IN WHICH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT COULD USE THE

PRESENT LULL TO MAKE SOME CHANGES IN PRISON ADMINISTRATION OF THE KIND THAT HAD BEEN PUT FORWARD EG BY THE CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE? THEY RECOGNISED THAT THE HUNGER STRIKERS MIGHT SIMPLY SWALLOW THOSE CHANGES AS CONCESSIONS AND PRESS HARDER STILL. BUT IF THEY, AS CONGRESSMEN, COULD HELP US TO UNDERMINE SUPPORT FOR THE PROVISIONAL IRA BY BEING ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAD MOVED AS FAR AS IT COULD AND THAT THE HUMANITARIAN ISSUE WAS SIMPLY A DISGUISE FOR UNACCEPTABLE DEMANDS, THEN THEY WOULD HAVE SOME CHANCE OF WINNING THE ARGUMENT AND STEMMING THE TIDE OF SUPPORT FOR PIRA. IF WE WERE NOT ABLE TO MAKE SUCH CHANGES, THEN, HOWEVER VALID OUR CASE MIGHT BE, WE WOULD LOSE THE SUPPORT OF AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AND TURN BACK THE CLOCK IN TERMS OF AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE PROVISIONALS TO THE DARK DAYS OF INTERNMENT.

5. I SAID THAT WE VIEWED THE CREATION OF THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND AS AN IMPORTANT AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT. WE UNDERSTOOD WHY SO MANY IN THE UNITED STATES FELT INVOLVED IN AND CONCERNED ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND. WE WERE VERY CONSCIOUS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AMERICAN DIMENSION AND RECOGNISED THE SIGNIFICANCE WHICH THE PROVISIONAL IRA ATTACHED TO WINNING AMERICAN SUPPORT, BOTH POPULAR AND FINANCIAL. I THEREFORE HAD TO TAKE VERY SERIOUSLY WHAT THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND HAD TOLD ME ABOUT THEIR DIFFICULTY IN STEMMING THE GROWING TIDE OF SUPPORT FOR THE HUNGER STRIKERS.

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BUT, AS THEY RECOGNISED, WHAT WAS AT ISSUE WAS NOT PRISON REFORM AS SUCH, BUT THE DEMAND BY A CRIMINAL, TERRORIST ORGANISATION THAT ITS CONVICTED MEMBERS BE TREATED IN A WAY WHICH WOULD GIVE THEM THE STATUS OF POLITICIANS AND THEIR CRIMES A RESPECTABILITY WHICH COULD NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY DEMOCRACY. NO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT WORTHY OF THE NAME COULD BE COERCED INTO DIGNIFYING VIOLENCE BY GIVING ITS PERPRETRATORS THE TITLE OF POLITICIANS. NO GOVERNMENT AND NO RESPONSIBLE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATION HAD ENDORSED THE PRISONERS' CLAIMS. SUCH RECOMMENDATIONS AS HAD BEEN MADE TO US BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS HAD BEEN IMPLEMENTED, ALONG WITH OTHER CHANGES, NONE OF WHICH HAD HAD THE SLIGHTEST EFFECT ON THE PROTESTING PRISONERS. THERE WAS EVERY INDICATION THAT IF WE WERE TO MAKE FURTHER CHANGES NOW THE PROVISIONAL IRA WOULD SIMPLY TAKE THEM AS A SIGN THAT THEY WERE WINNING AND PUSH ON WITH THE HUNGER STRIKE. JUST AS THE CHANGES THAT HAD ALREADY BEEN MADE WERE NOW TAKEN FOR GRANTED OR FORGOTTEN BY THOSE WHO WERE ASKING US TO MAKE CONCESSIONS, SO, IN A FEW WEEKS TIME, ANY NEW CONCESSIONS WOULD BE SWEEP AWAY AS WE FACED MORE, SUPERFICIALLY REASONABLE, DEMANDS TO MOVE JUST A LITTLE BIT FURTHER TO SAVE HUMAN LIVES.

6. I WAS STRUCK BY THE ALMOST TOTAL PREOCCUPATION OF THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND WITH THIS IMMEDIATE ISSUE. WITH ONE EXCEPTION, NOBODY MENTIONED THE QUESTION OF REUNIFICATION AND EVEN THEN IT WAS POINTED OUT BY TOM FOLEY THAT THE NEWLY PROMULGATED CHARTER OF THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND STATES CLEARLY THAT IRISH UNITY CAN BE REACHED ONLY WITH THE FREE CONSENT OF A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND, A STATEMENT WHICH HAS APPARENTLY DETERRED SOME CONGRESSMEN FROM JOINING THE GROUP.

7. INSOFAR AS THE STRENGTH OF AMERICAN PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL OPINION, AND OF AMERICAN FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE PROVISIONAL IRA, MUST WEIGH IN THE BALANCE IN OUR HANDLING OF THE HUNGER STRIKE. I THINK THAT THE ONE POINT MADE BY THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND WHICH WE MUST TAKE SERIOUSLY IS THEIR ESTIMATE OF NORAIID'S SUCCESS AND THE CONSEQUENT RESURGENCE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR NORAIID. ALSO EXPLICIT IN WHAT THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND WERE SAYING IS THAT, IF THERE ARE FURTHER DEATHS IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY MOVE AT ALL BY US, THE CONSEQUENT DAMAGE TO ANGLO/US RELATIONS WILL EXTEND BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE OF NORTHERN IRELAND. THIS IS VERY MUCH THE MESSAGE OF A LETTER WHICH SPEAKER O'NEILL HAS SENT TO PRESIDENT REAGAN, OF WHICH THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE SENT ME A COPY IN CONFIDENCE. TEXT IS IN MY IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TELEGRAM (NOT TO ALL)

HENDERSON

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FM WASHINGTON 241922Z

TO PRIORITY F C O

TELNO 1931 OF 24 JUNE 1981,

INFO NIO LONDON, NIO BELFAST, DUBLIN.

MIPT: NORTHERN IRELAND: MEETING WITH THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND.

1. FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF SPEAKER O'NEILL'S LETTER TO PRESIDENT REAGAN, DATED 19 MAY:

BEGINS:

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS A PROFOUNDLY DISTURBING DEVELOPMENT. THIS IS ESPECIALLY SO AS A RESULT OF UNPRECEDENTED DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN MRS. THATCHER AND MR. HAUGHEY REGARDING NORTHERN IRELAND WHICH BEGAN THIS YEAR WITH REAL HOPE OF POLITICAL PROGRESS.

NOW AS A RESULT OF THE I.R.A. HUNGER STRIKE AND A SUCCESSION OF HUNGER STRIKERS' DEATHS, THE SECTARIAN DIVISIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND HAVE INTENSIFIED, ANGLO-IRISH POLITICAL DIALOGUE HAS CEASED AND THE MODERATE POLITICAL LEADERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND HAVE BEEN PREEMPTED BY THE EXTREMIST PARAMILITARY GROUPS.

IN ADDITION, INTENSE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE HUNGER STRIKE IN THE UNITED STATES HAS DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED THE IMAGE OF THE PROVISIONAL I.R.A. AMONG THIRTY MILLION IRISH-AMERICANS AND REVERSED A FIVE YEAR TREND OF DECLINING FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE I.R.A. THIS IS MOST UNFORTUNATE AND DEEPLY UPSETS ME.

SENATORS KENNEDY AND MOYNIHAN, GOVERNOR CAREY AND I SENT MRS. THATCHER A TELEGRAM RECENTLY ASKING THAT SHE TAKE A MORE FLEXIBLE POSITION REGARDING THE PRISON RULES THE STRIKERS ARE PROTESTING. MRS. THATCHER INCORRECTLY INTERPRETED THIS AS SEEKING POLITICAL STATUS FOR THE STRIKERS: SOMETHING WE DO NOT SEEK.

MEMBERS OF THE I.R.A. ARE TERRORISTS AND SHOULD BE TREATED AS SUCH. BUT BY REFUSING TO NEGOTIATE REGARDING PRISON RULES, MRS. THATCHER IS PERMITTING THE TERRORISTS TO UNDO SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL PROGRESS MADE AS A RESULT OF HER RECENT TALKS WITH MR. HAUGHEY, AND THE STRIKE IS RAPIDLY ESCALATING VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND. NINETEEN PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THIS LATEST ROUND OF VIOLENCE.

THE UNITED KINGDOM IS OUR MOST TRUSTED AND FAITHFUL ALLY. WE JUST CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE A SITUATION SUCH AS THIS ONE WHICH THREATENS TO MEASURABLY DAMAGE THE IMAGE OF BRITAIN AMONG MANY AMERICANS AND WHICH HAS THE POTENTIAL TO RAISE A NUMBER OF SENSITIVE PROBLEMS AND ISSUES BETWEEN TWO OLD AND CLOSE ALLIES.

I AM FULLY AWARE OF YOUR COMMITMENT TO COMBAT TERRORISM AND I SHARE IT AS WELL. I AM ALSO AWARE OF MRS. THATCHER'S DEEP SENSITIVITY REGARDING PROVISIONAL I.R.A. VIOLENCE AND NORTHERN IRELAND'S STATUS AS PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM. HOWEVER, I AM CONVINCED THAT A PRIVATE AND DISCREET EXPRESSION OF CONCERN BY YOU AND SECRETARY HAIG CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD HELP DIRECT HER TOWARDS A POSTURE THAT WOULD END THE CURRENT IMPASSE. I ASSURE YOU THAT IF YOU AGREE TO ADDRESS THE MATTER WITH HER I WILL TREAT IT WITH THE UTMOST CONFIDENTIALITY.

THERE ARE STEPS, SHORT OF GRANTING POLITICAL STATUS TO THE PRISONER THAT CAN BE TAKEN THAT MIGHT BRING AN END TO THIS CURRENT STRIKE. TO ACCEPT THE STATUS QUO IS TO ACCEPT AN UNACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE IN A COMMUNITY, THE NATURE OF WHOSE CONFLICT, ATTRACTS THE ATTENTION AND UNFORTUNATELY THE INDIRECT PARTICIPATION OF A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

I AM WITNESSING YEARS OF MY EFFORTS TO DRAW IRISH AMERICAN SUPPORT AWAY FROM THE MEN OF VIOLENCE BEING NEGATED BY THE CURRENT STRIKE. THERE IS AND HAS BEEN FOR OVER TWO HUNDRED YEARS AN 'AMERICAN DIMENSION' TO THE IRISH PROBLEM. ON SOME OCCASIONS IT HAS NOT BEEN CONSTRUCTIVE; ON OTHERS IT HAS BEEN. I AM SURE THAT IN THIS INSTANCE IT WOULD BE CONSTRUCTIVE AND THE PEOPLE OF THAT TROUBLED LAND WOULD BENEFIT GREATLY.

ENDS.

HENDERSON

NORTHERN IRELAND LIMITED

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