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To: [Handwritten signature]

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Brian [Handwritten signature]

24 June 1981

You will infer from this, or also from the exchange of correspondence with Cardinal O'Fiaich & from Mr Humphrey's message, that there is a lot of pressure on the Secretary of State to respond in some way to the ICJP proposals.

Dear Michael,

[Handwritten signature] 24/6

Flags A.B.C.

You asked for a report on the latest developments on the prison front and in particular on Mr Alison's meeting with the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP) and the subsequent report of a reference to the Commission by the hunger striker McIlwee. By way of background I think you ought to have copies of a statement the ICJP made last August, before the start of the first hunger strike, of the second statement that they issued earlier this month, and of the reply to the latter made on behalf of the hunger strikers. These three documents are all attached.

The meeting was at the ICJP's request. In seeking it they said that their own information was that some of the families of the hunger strikers and of the prisoners also were "anxious to settle" on the basis of the ICJP's second statement. Our own intelligence supports this judgment, in that there is evidence of strain between some of the families and the Provisionals seeking to manipulate and control them.

In agreeing to the meeting, we had three objectives in mind. First, to be seen to be honouring the Government's public commitment to listen to responsible voices, particularly ones whose message has, as in this case, moved perceptibly nearer the Government's position. Second, by so doing, to help our friends in the Catholic community and so to check the process of alienation to which my Secretary of State has referred elsewhere. Third, to try to block the Provisionals' attempts to keep the families under control by denying them the chance of pointing to a refusal by the Government to listen to responsible people (in contrast to their own rigid stance).

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... I attach a copy of the record of the meeting. Of the three objectives we think that the first was secured: it is much too early to be able to tell how much bearing the exchange had on the second and third. For the time being the Commission remains firmly on our side. As you will see, Mr Alison made very clear our own scepticism about whether rational discussion of this kind had much to do with the real objectives of the Provisionals and the hunger strikers: and we believe that the ICJP got the message very clearly that there was no question of any inducement being offered in order to end the hunger strike. The Commission have asked to see Mr Alison again. No decision will be taken on this request until after tomorrow's Cabinet meeting.

Today's papers carried a statement attributed to McIlwee to the effect that the prisoners "were still available and prepared to talk about prison conditions" and referring also to a visit from a priest representing the Commission. This was almost certainly Father Crilly whose comments, during the course of the meeting, about the prisoners' attitudes were notably realistic.

I will keep you informed of any further developments.

*Yours sincerely,
Noel Cornick*

NOEL CORNICK