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FM DUBLIN 13:1245Z MAY 1981

TO IMMEDIATE DESKBY 13:1200Z FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 153 OF 13 MAY 1981

AND TO IMMEDIATE DESKBY 13:1200Z NIO (B)

REPEATED FOR INFO TO PRIORITY WASHINGTON

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ADVANCE COPY

HUNGER STRIKE: PUBLIC OPINION IN THE REPUBLIC.

1. IN VIEW OF MR JOHN HUME'S MEETING LATER TODAY WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, I AM SENDING THESE IMPRESSIONS OF THE MOOD IN DUBLIN AFTER HUGHES' DEATH. I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO THINK THAT PUBLIC OPINION IN THE REPUBLIC WILL REMAIN UNMOVED BY FURTHER DEATHS.

2. AS PREDICTED IN MY TELNO 132, SANDS' DEATH DID NOT AROUSE DEEP EMOTION HERE IN DUBLIN - MOST OF THE DAMAGE WAS DONE BY HOOLIGANS AND THE RELATIVE SMALL COMMEMORATION MARCH TOOK SOME DAYS TO ORGANISE. BUT A SIMILAR SIZED DEMONSTRATION TURNED UP OUTSIDE THE EMBASSY LAST NIGHT WITHIN THREE HOURS OF THE NEWS OF HUGHES' DEATH REACHING DUBLIN. FOR THE FIRST TIME THE DEMONSTRATORS TURNED VIOLENT AND THE GARDA WERE FORCED TO BATON-CHARGE THEM. (SEE MY SECOND IFT FOR FULL DETAILS.)

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3. WHILE IT IS TRUE TO SAY THAT PUBLIC OPINION IS NOT YET STRONGLY AROUSED THERE IS INCREASINGLY A MOOD THAT TWO DEATHS ARE ENOUGH. MR LENIHAN TOLD ME ON MONDAY THAT HE THOUGHT THAT THE IRISH GOVERNMENT COULD COPE WITH HUGHES' DEATH BUT THAT SOMETHING THEN HAD TO BE DONE TO PREVENT ANY FURTHER DEATHS.

THE IRISH SEE OUR CURRENT POLICY AS AN UNWILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER ANY COURSE OF ACTION OTHER THAN THE ONE WE CALCULATE TO GET COMPLETE SURRENDER BY THE STRIKERS. THEY SEE THIS AS JUST ONE MORE OCCASION WHEN BRITISH POLITICAL SENSE AND ACUMEN ARE SWITCHED OFF WHEN FACED WITH IRISH PROBLEMS. IN THIS THERE IS OF COURSE THE FEELING THAT OUR AREA OF POLITICAL MANOEUVRE IS MUCH TOO RESTRICTED BY CONSIDERATION OF WHAT THE PROTESTANTS MIGHT DO. ALMOST ALL SECTIONS OF OPINION ARE LONGING FOR SOME INITIATIVE BY US QUICKLY TO AVERT ANY MORE DEATHS. FOR US TO MAKE NO MOVE WILL, I FEAR, LEAD TO WIDESPREAD CRITICISM. THERE WILL BE A CORRESPONDING STRAIN ON ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS, AND WE NATURALLY CANNOT BE SURE THAT THE TAOISEACH WOULD STILL BE ABLE TO HOLD A MODERATE LINE.

4. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES MR HAUGHEY HAS SO FAR DONE US VERY WELL. HIS PUBLIC UTTERANCES (INCLUDING HIS STATEMENT LAST NIGHT - SEE MY THIRD IFT) HAVE BEEN RESTRAINED, BUT THE PRESENT SITUATION IS CAUSING MORE AND MORE DIFFICULTY. THERE ARE NOW LOUD MURMURINGS WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY AGAINST THE LINE WHICH HE IS TAKING. THIS IS REFLECTED IN THE WARNINGS WHICH EVEN OUR MOST WELL-DISPOSED CONTACTS HERE ARE NOW GIVING US. THEY ALSO SAY THAT PIRA WILL RECEIVE MORE SYMPATHY WITH EACH NEW DEATH.

5. THE HUNGER STRIKE HAS ALSO THROWN MR HAUGHEY'S ELECTORAL PLANS INTO DISARRAY. THE LONGER HE LEAVES AN ELECTION, THE WORSE THE ECONOMIC POSITION GETS (ONLY YESTERDAY THE BANKS ANNOUNCED A 1% INCREASE ON LENDING RATES). THE EXPECTATION YESTERDAY WAS THAT THE ELECTION WOULD BE CALLED IMMEDIATELY AFTER A FIANNA FAIL PARLIAMENTARY PARTY MEETING ALREADY ARRANGED FOR THE MORNING OF THURSDAY 14 MAY. BUT IT IS NOW SUGGESTED THAT HUGHES' DEATH MAY CAUSE A FURTHER POSTPONEMENT. IT IS NOW TOO LATE TO CALL AN ELECTION ON 4 JUNE SO THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE REALISTIC DATES FOR AN ELECTION ARE 10 AND 11 JUNE.

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