

GRPS 600

U N C L A S S I F I E D

FM DUBLIN 12:1515Z JANUARY 1981

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 10 OF 12 JANUARY 1981

AND TO PRIORITY NIO (BELFAST)

Irish
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N. I. PRISONS PROTEST: DEVELOPMENTS 9-11 JANUARY : IRISH MEDIA REACTIONS.

1. THE PAPERS IN THE IRISH REPUBLIC CONTAIN MIXED REACTIONS TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT STATEMENT OF 9 JANUARY, THE RELEASE OF PAULINE MCLAUGHLIN ON 10 JANUARY, AND THE STATEMENT PUPPORTING TO COME FROM THE H-BLOCK PRISONERS ON 11 JANUARY.

2. OF THE THREE DUBLIN DAILIES PUBLISHED ON 10 JANUARY, ONLY THE IRISH PRESS REPORTED THE GOVERNMENTS STATEMENT THE PREVIOUS EVENING (THE OTHER TWO PROBABLY WENT TO PRESS TOO EARLY TO DEAL WITH IT). THE PRESS REPORT, FROM ALAN MURRAY IN BELFAST, CONTAINED A FAIRLY FULL AND ACCURATE SUMMARY OF THE STATEMENT ON THE FRONT PAGE. THE STATEMENT WAS ALSO THE SUBJECT OF A CAUTIOUS AND GRUDGING EDITORIAL WHICH SPOKE IN CHARACTERISTIC TERMS OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT APPEARING TO SHOW QUOTE SOME WILLINGNESS TO SETTLE THE H-BLOCK PROBLEM UNQUOTE BUT QUOTE MADE NO REAL ATTEMPT TO KEEP ITS SIDE OF THE BARGAIN UNQUOTE ALTHOUGH QUOTE YESTERDAYS STATEMENT WAS MORE HOPEFUL UNQUOTE. HOWEVER, THE EDITORIAL WENT ON TO CRITICISE THE IRA WHICH QUOTE IS CERTAINLY DOING NOTHING TO EASE MATTERS UNQUOTE, AND CONDEMED THE ATTEMPT ON THE LIFE OF MR CHRISTOPHER TUGENDHAT AS QUOTE A DISGUSTING AND COLD BLOODED ATTACK ON A MAN WHO HAS HAD NO PART IN THE PROBLEMS OF THIS COUNTRY UNQUOTE.

3. THERE WAS NO SIGNIFICANT COMMENT ON THE PRISONS PROTEST IN THE REPUBLIC'S SUNDAY PAPERS, BUT THE RELEASE OF PAULINE MCLAUGHLIN AND THE STATEMENT FROM THE H-BLOCK PRISONERS ARE PROMINENTLY REPORTED IN THE THREE MAIN DUBLIN NEWSPAPERS TODAY, 12 JANUARY. A FULL REPORT BY ALAN MURRAY ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE IRISH PRESS QUOTES "REPUBLICAN SOURCES" AS BELIEVING THAT QUOTE SOME AGREEMENT UNQUOTE MUST HAVE BEEN REACHED BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PROTESTING PRISONERS ON THE ISSUE OF PRISON CLOTHES. IT ALSO REPORTS FATHER DENIS FAUL AS HAVING DETECTED QUOTE A MARGINALLY MORE HOPEFUL UNQUOTE ATMOSPHERE AMONG THE PRISONERS WHOM HE MET AT MASS ON SUNDAY 11 JANUARY. NATURALLY THE PRESS ALSO CONTAINS EDITORIAL COMMENT. UNDER THE HEADING, QUOTE GOOD NEWS UNQUOTE THIS STATES QUOTE THE SUSPENSION OF THE DIRTY PROTEST DOES OFFER SOME GROUNDS FOR HOPE SEMICOLON A GENEROUS RESPONSE BY THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE AND, EQUALLY IMPORTANTLY, A HELPFUL INTERPRETATION OF THE RULES BY THE OFFICIALS ON THE GROUND, SHOULD

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ENSURE THAT THOSE HOPES ARE FULFILLED. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE RELEASE FROM ARMAGH PRISON OF MISS MCLAUGHLIN IS BOTH SIGNIFICANT AND ENCOURAGING. THE NORTHERN SECRETARY OF STATE, MR ATKINS, HAS, PREDICTABLY INCURRED THE WRATH OF SOME UNIONIST POLITICIANS OVER THE DECISION, BUT THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN MERELY AS CONFIRMING THE CORRECTNESS OF WHAT HE HAS DONE UNQUOTE. (INTERVIEWED ON THE RTE RADIO NEWS TODAY AT 1.30 PM, TIM PAT COOGAN SAID THAT HE WAS CAUTIOUSLY HOPEFUL THAT AN END TO THE H-BLOCK PROBLEM WAS NOW IN SIGHT)

4. A FULL REPORT (FROM FIONNUALA O'CONNOR IN BELFAST) OF THE WEEKEND'S DEVELOPMENTS ALSO APPEARS AS THE MAIN ITEM ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE IRISH TIMES, THIS STATES (ERRONEOUSLY) THAT MISS MCLAUGHLIN HAD BEEN REALEASED THROUGH THE EXERCISE OF THE ROYAL PREROGATIVE, AND SUGGESTS THAT THIS HELPED QUOTE TO PRODUCE A MORE CONCILATORY ATTITUDE AMONG THE H-BLOCK PRISONERS UNQUOTE. DITORIAL COMMENT IN THE IRISH TIMES IS BRIEF AND BETRAYS THE UNCERTAINTY OF ITS AUTHOR WHO ASKS, WITHOUT SUPPLYING AN ANSWER, QUOTE WHO IS WINNING IN THIS H-BLOCK CAT AND MOUSE GAME? UNQUOTE, AND GOES IN TO ASCRIBE THE CONFUSION OVER THE NEGOTIATIONS TO BRITISH GOVERNMENT QUOTE BUNGLING UNQUOTE RATHER THAN A QUOTE DEEP PLOT ON THE PART OF THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES. UNQUOTE

5. THE IRISH INDEPENDENT CONTAINS AN ARTICLE ON THE BACK PAGE DEALING WITH THE PRISONS PROTEST, BUT NO EDITORIAL COMMENT. THIS IS IN LINE WITH THAT NEWSPAPERS GROWING PREOCCUPATION WITH ATTACKING MR HAUGHEY'S GOVERNMENT OVER ITS FAILURES IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE, TO THE EXCLUSION OF OTHER NEWS.

STAPLES

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

ADDITIONAL DISTN.
NORTHERN IRELAND

[NOT ADVANCED]